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HOPES AND FEARS;

OR,

SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF A SPINSTER.

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SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF A SPINSTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE,'
'HEARTSEASE,' &c.

This is the calm of the autumnal eve.

THE BAPTISTERY.



IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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HOPES AND FEARS.

CHAPTER I.

An upper and a lower spring
To thee, to all are given ;
They mingle not, apart they gleam,
The joys of earth, of heaven on high ;
God grant thee grace to choose the spring,
Even before the nether spring is dry.

M.



‘**O**NE moment, Phœbe, I'll walk a little way with you ;’ and Honor Charlecote, throwing on bonnet and scarf, hurried from the drawing-room where Mrs. Saville was working.

In spite of that youthful run, and girlish escape from ‘company’ to a confidante, the last fortnight had left deep traces. Every incipient furrow had become visible, the cheeks had fallen, the eyes sunk, the features grown prominent, and the auburn curls were streaked with silver threads never previously perceptible to a casual eye. While languid, mechanical talk was passing, Phœbe had been mourning over the change ; but she found her own Miss Charlecote restored in the freer manner, the long sigh, the tender grasp of the arm, as soon as they were in the open air

‘Phœbe,’ almost in a whisper, ‘I have a letter from him.’

Phœbe pressed her arm, and looked her sympathy.

‘Such a nice letter,’ added Honor. ‘Poor fellow ! he has suffered so much. Should you like to see it ?’

Owen had not figured to himself what eyes would peruse his letter ; but Honor was in too much need of sympathy to withhold the sight from the only person who she could still hope would be touched.

‘You see he asks nothing, nothing,’ she wistfully pleaded. ‘Only pardon ! Not to come home ; nor anything.’

‘Yes ; surely, that is real contrition.’

‘Surely, surely it is : yet they are not satisfied.—Mr. Saville and Sir John. They say it is not full confession ; but you see he does refer to the rest. He says he has deeply offended in other ways.’

‘The rest ?’

‘You do not know ? I thought your brother had told you. No ? Ah ! Robert is his friend. Mr. Saville went, and found it out. It was very right of him, I believe. Quite right I should know ; but——’

‘Dear Miss Charlecote, it has pained you terribly.’

‘It is what young men do ; but I did not expect it of him. Expensive habits, debts, I could have borne, especially with the calls for money his poor wife must have caused ; but I don’t know how to believe that he gave himself out as my heir, and obtained credit on that account—a bond to be paid on my death !’

Phœbe was too much shocked to answer.

‘As soon as Mr. Saville heard of these troubles,’ continued Honor, ‘as, indeed, I put all into his hands, he thought it right I should know all. He went to Oxford, found out all that was against poor Owen, and then proceeded to London, and saw the lawyer in whose hands Captain Charteris had left those children’s affairs. He was very glad to see Mr. Saville, for he thought Miss Sandbrook’s friends ought to know what she was doing. So it came out that Lucilla had been to him,

insisting on selling out nearly all her fortune, and paying off with part of it this horrible bond.'

'She is paying his debts, rather than let you hear of them.'

'And *they* are very angry with him for permitting it; as if he or anybody else had any power to stop Lucy! I know as well as possible that it is she who will not let him confess and make it all open with me. And yet, after this, what right have I to say I *know*? How little I ever knew that boy! Yes, it is right it should be taken out of my hands—my blindness has done harm enough already; but if I had not bound myself to forbear, I could not help it, when I see the Savilles so much set against him. I do not know that they are more severe in action than—than perhaps they ought to be, but they will not let me pity him.'

'They ought not to dictate to you,' said Phœbe, indignantly.

'Dictate! Oh, no, my dear. If you could only hear his compliments to my discretion, you would know that he is thinking all the time there is no fool like an old fool. No, I don't complain. I have been wilful, and weak, and blind, and these are the fruits! It is right that others should judge for him, and I deserve that they should come and guard me; though, when I think of such untruth throughout, I don't feel as if there were danger of my ever being more than sorry for him.'

'It is worse than the marriage,' said Phœbe, thoughtfully.

'There might have been generous risk in that. This was—oh, very nearly treachery! No wonder Lucy tries to hide it! I hope never to say a word to her to show that I am aware of it.'

'She is coming home, then?'

'She must, since she has broken with the Characters; but she has never written. Has Robert mentioned her?'

'Never; he writes very little. I long to know

how it is with him. Now that he has signed his contract, and made all his arrangements, he cannot retract; but—but we shall see,’ said Honor, with one gleam of playful hope. ‘If she should come home to me, ready to submit and be gentle, there might be a chance yet. I am sure he is poor Owen’s only real friend. If I could only tell you half my gratitude to him for it! And I will tell you what Mr. Saville has actually consented to my doing—I may give Owen enough to cover his premium and outfit; and I hope that may set him at ease in providing for his child for the present from his own means, as he ought to do.’

‘Poor little thing! what will become of it?’

‘He and his sister must arrange,’ said Honor, hastily, as if silencing a yearning of her own. ‘I do not need the Savilles to tell me that I must not take it off their hands. The responsibility may be a blessing to him, and it would be wrong to relieve him of a penalty in the natural course of Providence.’

‘There, now you have put it into my head to think what a pleasure it would be to you——’

‘I have done enough for my own pleasure, Phœbe. Had you only seen that boy when I had him first from his father, and thought him too much of the angel to live!’

There was a long pause, and Honor at length exclaimed, ‘I see the chief reason the Savilles came here!’

‘Why?’

‘To hinder my seeing him before he goes.’

‘I am sure it would be sad pain to you,’ cried Phœbe, deprecatingly.

‘I don’t know. He must not come here; but since I have had this letter, I have longed to go up for one day, see him, and bring Lucy home. Mr. Saville might go with me. You don’t favour it, Phœbe? Would Robert?’

‘Robert would like to have Owen comforted,’ said Phœbe, slowly; ‘but not if it only made it worse pain for you. Dear Miss Charlecote, don’t you think, if

the worst had been the marriage, you would have tried everything to comfort him, but now that there is this other horrid thing, this presuming on your kindness, it seems to me as if you could not bear to see him.'

'When I think of their enmity and his sorrow, I feel drawn thither ; but when this deception comes before me, I had rather not look in his face again. If he petted me I should think he was taking me in again. He has Robert, he has his sister, and I have promised to let Mr. Saville judge. I think Mr. Saville would let me go if Robert said I ought.'

Phoebe fondled her, and left her relieved by the outpouring. Poor thing ! after mistakes which she supposed egregious in proportion to the consequences, and the more so because she knew her own good intentions, and could not understand the details of her errors, it was an absolute rest to delegate her authority, even though her affections revolted against the severity of the judge to whom she had delivered herself and her boy.

One comfort was, that he had been the adviser chosen for her by Humfrey. In obeying him, she put herself into Humfrey's hands ; and remembering the doubtful approval with which her cousin had regarded her connexion with the children, and his warnings against her besetting sin, she felt as if the whole was the continuation of the mistake of her life, her conceited disregard of his broad homely wisdom, and as if the only atonement in her power was to submit patiently to Mr. Saville's advice.

And in truth his measures were not harsh. He did not want to make the young man an outcast, only to prevent advantage being taken of indulgence which he overrated. It was rather his wife who was oppressive in her desire to make Miss Charlecote see things in a true light, and teach her, what she could never learn, to leave off loving and pitying. Even this was perhaps better for her than a solitude in which she might

have preyed upon herself, and debated over every step in conscious darkness.

Before her letter was received, Owen had signed his agreement with the engineer, and was preparing to sail in a fortnight. He was disappointed and humiliated that Honor should have been made aware of what he had meant to conceal, but he could still see that he was mercifully dealt with, and was touched by, and thankful for, the warm personal forgiveness, which he had sense enough to feel, even though it brought no relaxation of the punishment.

Lucy was positively glad of the non-fulfilment of the condition that would have taken her back to the Holt ; and without seeing the letter, had satisfaction in her resentment at Honor for turning on Owen vindictively, after having spoilt him all his life.

He silenced her summarily, and set out for his preparations. She had already carried out her project of clearing him of his liabilities. Mr. Prendergast had advised her strongly to content herself with the *post obit*, leaving the rest to be gradually liquidated as the means should be obtained ; but her wilful determination was beyond reasoning, and by tyrannical coaxing she bent him to her will, and obliged him to do all in which she could not be prominent.

Her own debts were a sorer subject, and she grudged the vain expenses that had left her destitute, without even the power of writing grandly to Horatia to pay off her share of the foreign expenditure. She had, to Mr. Prendergast's great horror, told him of her governess plan, but had proceeded no further in the matter than studying the advertisements, until finding that Honor only invited her, and not her nephew, home to the Holt, she proceeded to exhale her feelings by composing a sentence for the *Times*. 'As Governess, a Lady——'

'Mr. Prendergast.'

Reddening, and abruptly hasty, the curate entered, and sitting down without a word, applied himself to

cutting his throat with an ivory paper-knife. Lucilla began to speak, but at her first word, as though a spell were broken, he exclaimed, 'Cilly, are you still thinking of that ridiculous nonsense?'

'Going out as a governess? Look there; ' and she held up her writing.

He groaned, gave himself a slice under each ear, and viciously bit the end of the paper-knife.

'You are going to recommend me?' she said, with a coaxing look.

'You know I think it a monstrous thing.'

'But you know of a place, and will help me to it!' cried she, clapping her hands. 'Dear good Mr. Penty, always a friend in need!'

'Well, if you will have it so. It is not so bad as strangers. There's George's wife come to town to see a governess for little Sarah, and she wont do.'

'Shall I do?' asked Lucilla, with a droll shake of her sunny hair. 'Yes. I know you would vouch for me as tutoress to all the Princesses; able to teach the physical sciences, the guitar, and Arabic in three lessons; but if Mrs. Prendergast be the woman I imagine, much she will believe you. Aren't they inordinately clever?'

'Little Sarah is—let me see—quite a child. Her father did teach her, but he has less time in his new parish, and they think she ought to have more accomplishment, polish, and such like.'

'And imagine from the specimen before them that I must be an adept at polishing Prendergasts.'

'Now, Cilla, do be serious. Tell me if all this meant nothing, and I shall be very glad. If you were in earnest, I could not be so well satisfied to see you anywhere else. You would find Mrs. Prendergast quite a mother to you.'

'Only one girl! I wanted a lot of riotous boys, but beggars must not be choosers. This is just right—people out of the way of those who knew me in my palmy days, yet not absolute strangers.'

‘That was what induced me—they are so much interested about you, Cilla.’

‘And you have made a fine heroic story. I should not wonder if it all broke down when the parties met. When am I to be trotted out for inspection?’

‘Why, I told her if I found you really intended it, and had time, I would ask you to drive to her with me this morning, and then no one need know anything about it,’ he said, almost with tears in his eyes.

‘That’s right,’ cried Lucilla. ‘It will be settled before Owen turns up. I’ll get ready this instant. I say,’ she added at the door, ‘housemaids always come to be hired minus crinoline and flowers, is it the same with governesses?’

‘Cilla, how can you?’ said her friend, excessively distressed at the inferior position, but his depression only inspired her with a reactionary spirit of mischief.

‘Crape is inoffensive, but my hair! What shall I do with it? Does Mrs. Prendergast hold the prejudice against pretty governesses?’

‘She would take Venus herself if she talked no nonsense; but I don’t believe you are in earnest,’ growled the curate, angry at last.

‘That is encouragement!’ cried Lucilla, flying off laughing that she might hide from herself her own nervousness and dismay at this sudden step into the hard verity of self-dependence.

She could not stop to consider what to say or do, her refuge was always in the impromptu, and she was far more bent on forcing Mr. Prendergast to smile, and distracting herself from her one aching desire that the Irish journey had never been, than on forming any plan of action. In walking to the cab-stand they met Robert, and exchanged greetings; a sick faintness came over her, but she talked it down, and her laugh sounded in his ears when they had passed on.

Yet when the lodgings were reached, the sensation recurred, her breath came short, and she could hardly conceal her trembling. No one was in the room but a

lady who would have had far to seek for a governess less beautiful than herself. Insignificance was the first idea she inspired, motherliness the second, the third that she was a perfect lady, and a sensible woman. After shaking Lucilla kindly by the hand, and seating her on the sofa, she turned to her cousin, saying, 'Sarah and her papa are at the National Gallery, I wish you would look for them, or they will never be in time for luncheon.'

'Luncheon is not for an hour and a half.'

'But it is twenty minutes' walk, and they will forget food and everything else unless you keep them in order.'

'I'll go presently ;' but he did not move, only looking piteous while Mrs. Prendergast began talking to Lucilla about the pictures, until she, recovering, detected the state of affairs, and exclaimed with her ready grace and abruptness, 'Now, Mr. Prendergast, don't you see how much you are in the way?'

'A plain truth, Peter,' said his cousin, laughing.

Lucy stepped forward to him, saying affectionately, 'Please go ; you can't help me, and I am sure you may trust me with Mrs. Prendergast ;' and she stretched out a hand to the lady with an irresistible child-like gesture of confidence.

'Don't you think you may, Peter?' asked Mrs. Prendergast, holding the hand ; 'you shall find her here at luncheon. I won't do anything to her.'

The good curate groaned himself off, and Lucy felt so much restored that she had almost forgotten that it was not an ordinary call. Indeed she had never yet heard a woman's voice that thus attracted and softened her. Mrs. Prendergast needed not to be jealous of Venus, while she had such tenderness in her manner, such winning force in her tone.

'That was well done,' she said. 'Talking would have been impossible, while he sat looking on!'

'I am afraid he has given far too good an account of me,' said Lucy, in a low and trembling voice.

‘His account comes from one who has known you from babyhood.’

‘And spoilt me from babyhood!’

‘Yes, Sarah knows what Cousin Peter can do in that line. He had little that was new to tell us, and what he had was of a kind——’ She broke off, choked by tears. What she had heard of the girl’s self-devotion touched her trebly at the sight of one so small, young, and soft-looking. And if she had ever been dubious of ‘Peter’s pet,’ she was completely fascinated.

‘I must not be taken on his word,’ said Cilla, smiling.

‘No, that would not be right by any of us.’

‘Then pray be very hard with me—as a thorough stranger.’

‘But I am so inexperienced. I have only had one interview with a governess.’

‘And what did she do?’ asked Lucilla, as both recovered from a laugh.

‘She gave so voluble an account of her *acquirements* and *requirements*, that I was quite alarmed.’

‘I’m sure I can’t do that. I don’t know what I can do.’

A pause, broken by Lucy, who began to feel that she had more of the cool readiness of the great world. ‘How old is your daughter?’

‘Nearly fifteen. While we had our small parish in Sussex we taught her ourselves, and her father brought her on in Latin and Euclid. Do you know anything of those, Miss Sandbrook? not that it signifies.’

‘Miss Charlecote used to teach me with my brother. I have forgotten, but I could soon get them up again.’

‘They will hardly be wanted, but Sarah will respect you for them. Now, at Southminster, our time is so taken up that poor Sarah gets neglected, and it is very trying to an eager, diligent girl to prepare lessons, and have them continually put off, so we thought of indulging her with a governess, to bring her on in some of the

modern languages and accomplishments that have grown rusty with us.'

'I think I could do that,' said Lucilla. 'I believe I know what other people do, and my languages are fresh from the Continent. Ought I to give you a specimen of my pronunciation?'

'Pray don't,' laughed Mrs. Prendergast. 'You know better than I what is right, and must prepare to be horrified by the sounds you will hear.'

'I ought to have brought my sketches. I had two years of lessons from S——.'

'Sarah is burning for teaching in that line. Music? Dr. Prendergast likes the grand old pieces, and hardly cares for modern ones.'

'I hardly played anything newer than Mozart at Hiltonbury. Miss Charlecote taught me very well, I believe, and I had lessons from the organist from Elverslope, besides a good deal in the fashionable line since. I have kept that up. One wants it.'

There was another shy pause, and Lucilla growing more scrupulous and more confidential, volunteered,—
'Mine has been an idle life since I came out. I am three-and-twenty now, and have been diligently forgetting for the last six years. Did you know that I had been a fast young lady?'

But things had come to such a pass, that say what she would, all passed for ingenuous candour and humility, and the answer was,—

'I know that you have led a very trying life, but to have passed through such unscathed, is no disadvantage.'

'If I have,' said Lucy, sadly.

Mrs. Prendergast, who had learned all the facts of Lucilla's history through the Wrapworth medium, knew only the heroic side of her character, and admired her the more for her diffidence. So when terms were spoken of, the only fear on the one side was, that such a treasure must be beyond her means; on the other, lest what she needed for her nephew's sake might de-

prive her of such a home. However, seventy pounds a year proved to be in the thoughts of both, and the preliminaries ended with, 'I hope you will find my little Sarah a pleasant companion. She is a good girl, and intelligent, but you must be prepared for a few angles.'

'I like angles. I don't care for commonplace people.'

'I am afraid you will find many such at Southminster. We cannot promise you the society you have been used to.'

'I am tired of society. I have had six years of it !' and she sighed.

'You must fix your own time,' said Mrs. Prendergast ; 'and indeed we will try to make you at home.'

'My brother will be gone in a fortnight,' said Lucilla. 'After that I should like to come straight to you.'

Her tone and look made those two last words not merely *chez vous*, but to *you*, individually—to you, kind one, who will comfort me after the cruel parting. Mrs. Prendergast put her arm round her and kissed her.

'Don't,' said Lucilla, with the sweetest April face. 'I can't bear being made foolish.'

Nevertheless Mrs. Prendergast showed such warm interest in all her concerns, that she felt only that she had acquired a dear friend by the time the others came in, father and daughter complaining, the one gaily, the other dolefully, that Cousin Peter had so hunted them that they could look at nothing in peace. Indeed he was in such a state of restless misery, that Mrs. Prendergast in compassion to him, sent her daughter to dress, called her husband away, and left the place clear for him to say, in a tone of the deepest commiseration, 'Well, my poor child ?'

'O, Mr. Pendy, you have found me a true home. Be the others what they may, there must be rest in hearing *her* voice !'

‘It is settled, then?’

‘Yes. I only hope you have not taken them in. I did my best to let her know the worst of me, but it would make no impression. Seventy pounds a year. I hope that is not wicked.’

‘O, Cilla, what would your father feel?’

‘Come, we wont fight that over again. I thought I had convinced you of the dignity of labour, and I do feel as if at last I had lit on some one whom I could allow to do me good.’

She could not console him ; he grieved over her changed circumstances with far more regret than she felt, and though glad for her sake that she should be with those whom he could trust, yet his connexion with her employers seemed to him undutiful towards his late rector. All that she saw of them reassured her. The family manners were full of well-bred good-humour, full of fun, with high intelligence, much real refinement, and no pretension. The father was the most polished, with the scholarly courtesy of the dignified clergyman ; the mother was the most simple and caressing ; the daughter somewhat uncouth, readily betraying both her feelings and her cleverness and drollery in the style of the old friend whom Lucilla was amused to see treated as a youth and almost a contemporary of her pupil. What chiefly diverted her was the grotesque aspect of Dr. Prendergast and his daughter. Both were on a large scale, with immense mouths, noses turned up to display wide nostrils, great grey eyes, angularly set, yellow hair and eyebrows, red complexions, and big bones. The Doctor had the advantage of having outgrown the bloom of his ugliness ; his forehead was bald and dignified, his locks softened by grizzling, and his fine expression and clerical figure would have carried off all the quaintness of his features if they had not been so comically caricatured in his daughter ; yet she looked so full of life and character that Lucilla was attracted, and sure of getting on well with her. Moreover, the little elf felt the im-

pression she was creating in this land of Brobdingnag. Sarah was looking at her as a terra-cotta pitcher might regard a cup of egg-shell china, and Lucy had never been lovelier. Her mourning enhanced the purity of her white skin, and marked her slender faultless shape, her flaxen hair hung in careless wreaths of ringlet and braid ; her countenance, if pale, had greater sweetness in its dejection, now and then brightened by gleams of her courageous spirit. Sarah gazed with untiring wonder, pardoning Cousin Peter for disturbing the contemplation of Domenichino's art, since here was a witness that heroines of romance were no mere myths, but that beings of ivory and rose, sapphire eyes and golden hair, might actually walk the earth.

The Doctor was pleasant and friendly, and after luncheon the whole party started together to 'do' St. Paul's, whence Mr. Prendergast undertook to take Cilla home, but in no haste to return to the lonely house. She joined in the lionizing, and made a great impression by her familiarity with London, old and new. Little store as she had set by Honor's ecclesiology and antiquarianism, she had not failed to imbibe a tincture sufficient to go a long way by the help of ready wit, and she enchanted the Doctor by her odd bits of information on the localities, and by guiding him to out-of-the-way curiosities. She even carried the party to Woolstone Lane, displayed the Queen of Sheba, the cedar carving, the merchant's mark, and had lifted out Stow's *Survey*, where Sarah was delighted with Ranelagh, when the door opened, and Owen stood, surprised and blank. Poor fellow, the voices had filled him with hope that he should find Honor there. The visitors, startled at thus intruding on his trouble, and knowing him to be in profound disgrace, would have gone, but he, understanding them to be Mr. Prendergast's friends, and glad of variety, was eagerly courteous and hospitable, detaining them by displaying fresh curiosities, and talking with so much knowledge and brilliance, that they were too well

entertained to be in haste. Lucilla, accepting Mrs. Prendergast as a friend, was rejoiced that she should have such demonstration that her brother was a thorough gentleman ; and in truth Owen did and said everything so well that no one could fail to be pleased, and only as an after-thought could come the perception that his ease hardly befitted the circumstances, and that he comported himself more like the master of the house than as a protégé under a cloud.

No sooner had he handed them into their vehicle than he sank into a chair, and burst into one of the prolonged, vehement fits of laughter that are the reaction of early youth unwontedly depressed. Never had he seen such visages ! They ought at once to be sketched—would be worth any money to Currie the architect, for gurgoyles.

‘For shame,’ said Lucilla, glad, however, once more to hear the merry peal ; ‘for shame, to laugh at my master!’

‘I’m not laughing at old Pendency, his orifice is a mere crevice comparatively. The charm is in seeing it classified—the recent sloth accounted for by the ancient megatherium.’

‘The megatherium is my master. Yes, I’m governess to Glumdalclitch!’

‘You’ve done it?’

‘Yes, I have. Seventy pounds a year.’

He made a gesture of angry despair, crying, ‘Worse luck than I thought.’

‘Better luck than I did.’

‘Old Pendency thrusting in his oar ! I’d have put a stop to your absurdity at once, if I had not been sure no one would be deluded enough to engage you, and that you would be tired of looking out, and glad to go back to your proper place at the Holt before I sailed.’

‘My proper place is where I can be independent.’

‘Faugh ! If I had known it, they should never have seen the Roman coins ! There ! it is a lesson that nothing is too chimerical to be worth opposing !’

‘Your opposition would have made no difference.’

He looked at her silently, but with a half smile in lip and eye that showed her that the moment was coming when the man’s will might be stronger than the woman’s.

Indeed, he was so thoroughly displeased and annoyed that she durst not discuss the subject with him, lest she should rouse him to take some strong authoritative measures against it. He had always trusted to the improbability of her meeting with a situation before his departure, when, between entreaty and command, he had reckoned on inducing her to go home ; and this engagement came as a fresh blow, making him realize what he had brought on those nearest and dearest to him. Even praise of Mrs. Prendergast provoked him, as if implying Lucilla’s preference for her above the tried friend of their childhood ; he was in his lowest spirits, hardly speaking to his sister all dinner time, and hurried off afterwards to pour out his vexation to Robert Fulmort. Poor Robert ! what an infliction ! To hear of such a step, and be unable to interfere ; to admire, yet not approve ; to dread the consequences, and perceive so much alloy as to dull the glitter of the gold, as well as to believe his own stern precipitation as much the cause as Owen’s errors : yet all the time to be the friend and comforter to the wounded spirit of the brother ! It was a severe task ; and when Owen left him, he felt spent and wearied as by bodily exertion, as he hid his face in prayer for one for whom he could do no more than pray.

Feelings softened during the fortnight that the brother and sister spent together. Childish as Owen had undergone the relations and troubles of more advanced life, pettishly as he had striven against feeling and responsibility, the storm had taken effect. Hard as he had struggled to remain a boy, manhood had suddenly grown on him ; and probably his exclusion from Hiltonbury did more to stamp the impression of his guilt than did its actual effects. He was eager for his

new life, and pleased with his employer, promising himself all success, and full of enterprise. But his banishment from home and from Honor clouded everything ; and, as the time drew nearer, his efforts to forget and be reckless gradually ceased. Far from shunning Lucilla, as at first, he was unwilling to lose sight of her, and they went about together wherever his preparations called him, so that she could hardly make time for stitching, marking, and arranging his purchases.

One good sign was, that, though hitherto fastidiously expensive in dress and appointments, he now grudged himself all that was not absolutely necessary, in the endeavour to leave as large a sum as possible with Mrs. Murrell. Even in the tempting article of mathematical instruments he was provident, though the polished brass, shining steel, and pure ivory, in their perfection of exactitude, were as alluring to him as ever gem or plume had been to his sister. That busy fortnight of chasing after the 'reasonable and good,' speeding about till they were footsore, discussing, purchasing, packing, and contriving, united the brother and sister more than all their previous lives.

It was over but too soon. The last evening was come ; the hall was full of tin cases and leathern port-manteaus, marked O. C. S., and of piles of black boxes large enough to contain the little lady whose name they bore. Southminster lay in the Trent Valley, so the travellers would start together, and Lucilla would be dropped on the way. In the cedar parlour, Owen's black knapsack lay open on the floor, and Lucilla was doing the last office in her power for him, and that a sad one, furnishing the Russia-leather housewife with the needles, silk, thread, and worsted for his own mendings when he should be beyond the reach of the woman-kind who cared for him.

He sat resting his head on his hand, watching her in silence, till she was concluding her work. Then he said, 'Give me a bit of silk,' turned his back on her, and stood up, doing something by the light of the

lamp. She was kneeling over the knapsack, and did not see what he was about, till she found his hand on her head, and heard the scissors close, when she perceived that he had cut off one of her pale, bright ringlets, and saw his pocket-book open, and within it a thick, jet-black tress, and one scanty, downy tuft of baby hair. She made no remark ; but the tears came dropping, as she packed ; and, with a sudden impulse to give him the thing above all others precious to her, she pulled from her bosom a locket, hung from a slender gold chain, and held it to him—

‘Owen, will you have this?’

‘Whose? My father’s?’

‘And my mother’s. He gave it to me when he went to Nice.’

Owen took it, and looked at it thoughtfully.

‘No, Lucy,’ he said ; ‘I would not take it from you on any account. You have always been his faithful child.’

‘Mind you tell me if any one remembers him in Canada,’ said Lucilla, between relief and disappointment, restoring her treasure to the place it had never left before. ‘You will find out whether he is recollected at his mission.’

‘Certainly. But I do not expect it. The place is a great town now. I say, Lucy, if you had one bit of poor Honor’s hair!’

‘No : you will never forgive me. I had some once, made up in a little cross, with gold ends ; but one day, when she would not let me go to Castle Blanch, I shied it into the river, in a rage.’

She was touched at his being so spiritless as not even to say that she ought to have been thrown in after it.

‘I wonder,’ she said, by way of enlivening him, ‘whether you will fall in with the auburn-haired Charlecote,’

‘Whereas Canada is a bigger place than England, the disaster may be averted, I hope. A colonial heir-

at-law might be a monstrous bore. Moreover, it would cancel all that I can't but hope for that child.'

'You might hope better things for him than expectations.'

'He shall never have any! But it might come without. Why, Lucy, a few years in that country, and I shall be able to give him the best of educations and release you from drudgery; and when independent, we could go back to the Holt on terms to suit even your proud stomach, and might make the dear old thing happy in her old age.'

'If that Holt were but out of your head.'

'If I knew it willed to the County Hospital, shouldn't I wish as much to be with her as before? I mean to bring up my son as a gentleman, with no one's help! But you see, Lucy, it is impossible not to wish for one's child what one has failed in oneself—to wish him to be a better edition.'

'I suppose not.'

'For these first few years the old woman will do well enough for him, poor child. Robert has promised to look in on him.'

'And Mrs. Murrell is to write to me once a month. I shall make a point of seeing him at least twice a year.'

'Thank you; and by the time he is of any size I shall have a salary. I may come back, and we would keep house together, or you might bring him out to me.'

'That will be the hope of my life.'

'I'll not be deluded into reckoning on young ladies. You will be disposed of long before!'

'Don't, Owen! No, never.'

'Never?'

'Never.'

'I always wanted to know,' continued Owen, 'what became of Calthorp.'

'I left him behind at Spitzwasserfitzung, with a message that ends it for ever.'

‘I am afraid that defection is to be laid to my door, like all the rest.’

‘If so, I am heartily obliged to you for it! The shock was welcome that brought me home. A governess? Oh! I had rather be a scullery-maid, than go on as I was doing there!’

‘Then you did not care for him?’

‘Never! But he pestered me, Rashe pestered me; nobody cared for me—I—I—’ and she sobbed a long, tearless sob.

‘Ha?’ said Owen, gravely and kindly, ‘then there was something in the Fulmort affair after all. Lucy, I am going away; let me hear it for once. If I ever come back, I will not be so heedless of you as I have been. If he have been using you ill!’

‘I used him ill,’ said Lucy, in an inward voice.

‘Nothing more likely!’ muttered Owen, in soliloquy. ‘But how is it, Cilla; can’t you make him forgive?’

‘He does, but as Honor forgives you. You know it was no engagement. I worked him up to desperation last year. Through Phœbe, I was warned that he would not stand my going to Ireland. I answered that it was no concern of his; I defied him to be able to break with me. They bothered me so that I was forced to go to spite them. He thought—I can’t wonder at it—that I was irreclaimable; he was staying here, was worked on by the sight of this horrible district, and, between pique and goodness run mad, has devoted self and fortune. He gave me to understand that he has made away with every farthing. I don’t know if he would wish it undone.’

She spoke into the knapsack, jerking out brief sentences.

‘He didn’t tell you he had taken a vow of celibacy?’

‘I should not think it worth while.’

‘Then it is all right!’ exclaimed Owen, joyously. ‘Do you think old Fulmort, wallowing in gold, could

see a son of his living with his curates, as in the old Sussex rhyme?—

There were three ghostisses
Sitting on three postisses,
Eating of three crustisses.

No, depend on it, the first alarm of Robert becoming a ghost, there will be a famous good fat living bought for him ; and then——’

‘No, I shall have been a governess. They wont consent.’

‘Pshaw ! What are the Fulmorts ? He would honour you the more ! No, Lucy,’ and he drew her up from the floor, and put his arm round her, ‘girls who stick to one as you have done to me are worth something, and so is Robert Fulmort. You don’t know what he has been to me ever since he came to fetch me. I didn’t believe it was in his cloth or his nature to be so forbearing. No worrying with preachments ; not a bit of “What a good boy am I ;” always doing the very thing that was comfortable and considerate, and making the best of it at Hiltonbury. I didn’t know how he could be capable of it, but now I see, it was for your sake. Cheer up, Lucy, you will find it right yet.’

Lucilla had no conviction that he was right ; but she was willing to believe for the time, and was glad to lay her head on his shoulder and feel, while she could, that she had something entirely her own. Too soon it would be over. Lengthen the evening as they would, morning must come at last.

It came ; the hurried breakfast, pale looks, and trivial words. Robert arrived to watch them off ; Mrs. Murrell brought the child. Owen took him in his arms, and called her to the study. Robert sat still, and said,—

‘I will do what I can. I think, in case I had to write about the child, you had better leave me your address.’

Lucilla wrote it on a card. The tone quashed all hope.

‘We trust to you,’ she said.

‘Mr. Currie has promised to let me hear of Owen,’ said Robert; but no more passed. Owen came back hasty and flushed, wanting to be gone and have it over. The cabs were called, and he was piling them with luggage; Robert was glad to be actively helpful. All were in the hall; Owen turned back for one more solitary gaze round the familiar room; Robert shook Lucilla’s hand.

‘O bid me good speed,’ broke from her; ‘or I cannot bear it.’

‘God be with you! God bless you!’ he said.

No more! He had not approved, he had not blamed. He would interfere no more in her fate. She seated herself, and drew down her black veil, a chill creeping over her.

‘Thank you, Robert, for all,’ was Owen’s farewell. ‘If you will say anything to Phoebe from me, tell her she is all that is left to comfort poor Honor.’

‘Good-bye,’ was the only answer.

Owen lingered still. ‘You’ll write? Tell me of her; Honor, I mean, and the child.’

‘Yes, yes, certainly.’

Unable to find another pretext for delay, Owen again wrung Robert’s hand, and placed himself by his sister, keeping his head out as long as he could see Robert standing with crossed arms on the doorstep.

When, the same afternoon, Mr. Parsons came home, he blamed himself for having yielded to his youngest curate the brunt of the summer work. Never had he seen a man not unwell look so much jaded and depressed.

Nearly at the same time, Lucilla and her boxes were on the platform of the Southminster station, Owen’s eyes straining after her as the train rushed on, and she feeling positive pain and anger at the sympathy of Dr. Prendergast’s kind voice, as though it would have been

a relief to her tumultuous misery to have bitten him, like Uncle Kit long ago. She clenched her hand tight, when with old-world courtesy he made her take his arm, and with true consideration, conducted her down the hill, through the quieter streets, to the calm, shady precincts of the old cathedral. He had both a stall and a large town living ; and his abode was the grey freestone prebendal house, whose two deep windows under their peaked gables gave it rather a cat-like physiognomy. Mrs. Prendergast and Sarah were waiting in the hall, each with a kiss of welcome, and the former took the pale girl at once upstairs, to a room full of subdued sunshine, looking out on a green lawn sloping down to the river. At that sight and sound, Lucy's face lightened. 'Ah ! I know I shall feel at home here. I hear the water's voice !'

But she had brought with her a heavy cold, kept in abeyance by a strong will during the days of activity, and ready to have its way at once, when she was beaten down by fatigue, fasting, and disappointment. She dressed and came down, but could neither eat nor talk, and in her pride was glad to attribute all to the cold, though protesting with over-eagerness that such indisposition was rare with her.

She would not have suffered such nursing from Honor Charlecote as was bestowed upon her. The last month had made tenderness valuable, and without knowing all, kind Mrs. Prendergast could well believe that there might be more than even was avowed to weigh down the young head, and cause the fingers, when unobserved, to lock together in suppressed agony.

While Sarah only knew that her heroine-looking governess was laid up with severe influenza, her mother more than guessed at the kind of battle wrestled out in solitude, and was sure that more than brother, more than friend, had left her to that lonely suffering, which was being for the first time realized. But no confidence was given ; when Lucilla spoke, it was

only of Owen, and Mrs. Prendergast returned kindness and forbearance.

It was soothing to be dreamily in that summer room, the friendly river murmuring, the shadows of the trees lazily dancing on the wall, the cathedral bells chiming, or an occasional deep note of the organ stealing in through the open window. It suited well with the languor of sensation that succeeded to so much vehemence and excitement. It was not thought, it was not resignation, but a species of repose and calm, as if all interest, all feeling were over for her, and as if it mattered little what might further befall her, as long as she could be quiet, and get along from one day to another. If it had been repentance, a letter would have been written very unlike the cold announcement of her situation, the scanty notices of her brother, with which she wrung the heart that yearned after her at Hilton-bury ! But sorry she was, for one part at least, of her conduct, and she believed herself reduced to that meek and correct state that she had always declared should succeed her days of gaiety, when, recovering from her indisposition, she came down subdued in tone, and anxious to fulfil what she had undertaken.

‘ Ah ! if Robert could see me now, he would believe in me,’ thought she to herself, as she daily went to the cathedral. She took classes at school, helped to train the St. Jude’s choir, played Handel for Dr. Prendergast, and felt absolutely without heart or inclination to show that self-satisfied young curate that a governess was not a subject for such distant perplexed courtesy. Sad at heart, and glad to distract her mind by what was new yet innocent, she took up the duties of her vocation zealously ; and quickly found that all her zeal was needed. Her pupil was a girl of considerable abilities—intellectual, thoughtful, and well taught ; and she herself had been always so unwilling a learner, so willing a forgetter, that she needed all the advantages of her grown-up mind and rapidity of perception to keep her sufficiently beforehand with Sarah,

whenever subjects went deep or far. If she pronounced like a native, and knew what was idiomatic, Sarah, with her clumsy pronunciation, had further insight into grammar, and asked perplexing questions ; if she played admirably and with facility, Sarah could puzzle her with the science of music ; if her drawing were ever so effective and graceful, Sarah's less sightly productions had correct details that put hers to shame, and, for mere honesty's sake, and to keep up her dignity, she was obliged to work hard, and recur to the good grounding that against her will she had received at Hiltonbury. 'Had her education been as superficial as that of her cousins,' she wrote to her brother, 'Sarah would have put her to shame long ago ; indeed nobody but the Fennimore could be thoroughly up to that girl.'

Perhaps all her endeavours would not have impressed Sarah, had not the damsel been thoroughly imposed on by her own enthusiasm for Miss Sandbrook's grace, facility, alertness, and beauty. The power of doing prettily and rapidly whatever she took up dazzled the large and deliberate young person, to whom the right beginning and steady thoroughness were essential, and she regarded her governess as a sort of fairy—toiling after her in admiring hopelessness, and delighted at any small success.

Fully aware of her own plainness, Sarah adored Miss Sandbrook's beauty, took all admiration of it as personally as if it had been paid to her bulfinch, and was never so charmed as when people addressed themselves to the governess as the daughter of the house. Lucilla, however, shrank into the background. She was really treated thoroughly as a relation, but she dreaded the remarks and inquiries of strangers, and wished to avoid them. The society of the cathedral town was not exciting nor tempting, and she made no great sacrifice in preferring her pretty schoolroom to the dinners and evening parties of the Close ; but she did so in a very becoming manner, and delighted

Sarah with stories of the great world, and of her travels.

There could be no doubt that father, mother, and daughter all liked and valued her extremely, and she loved Mrs. Prendergast as she had never loved woman before, with warm, filial, confiding love. She was falling into the interests of the cathedral and the parish, and felt them, and her occupations in the morning satisfying and full of rest after the unsatisfactory whirl of her late life. She was becoming happier than she knew, and at any rate felt it a delusion to imagine the post of governess an unhappy one. Three years at Southminster (for Sarah strenuously insisted that she would come out as late as possible) would be all peace, rest, and improvement; and by that time Owen would be ready for her to bring his child out to him or else——

Little did she reckon of the grave, displeased, yet far more sorrowful letter in which Honor wrote, 'You have chosen your own path in life, may you find it one of improvement and blessing! But I think it right to say, that though real distress shall of course always make what is past forgotten, yet you must not consider Hiltonbury a refuge if you grow hastily weary of your exertions. Since you refuse to find a mother in me, and choose to depend on yourself alone, it must be in earnest, not caprice.'



CHAPTER II.

These are of beauty rare,
In holy calmness growing,
Of minds whose richness might compare
E'en with thy deep tints glowing.
Yet all unconscious of the grace they wear.

Like flowers upon the spray,
All lowliness, not sadness,
Bright are their thoughts, and rich, not gay,
Grave in their very gladness,
Shedding calm summer light over life's changeful day.
To the Fuchsia.—S. D.

PHŒBE FULMORT sat in her own room. The little round clock on the mantelpiece pointed to eleven. The fire was low but glowing. The clear gas shone brightly on the toilette apparatus, and on the central table, loaded with tokens of occupation, but neat and orderly as the lines in the clasped volume where Phœbe was dutifully writing her abstract of the day's reading and observation, in childishly correct miniature round-hand.

The curtain was looped up, and the moon of a frosty night blanched a square on the carpet beneath the window, at which she often looked with a listening gaze. Her father and brother had been expected at dinner-time; and though their detention was of frequent occurrence, Phœbe had deferred undressing till

it should be too late for their arrival by the last train, since they would like her to preside over their supper, and she might possibly hear of Robert, whose doings her father had of late seemed to regard with less displeasure, though she had not been allowed to go with Miss Charlecote to the consecration of his church, and had not seen him since the Horticultural Show.

She went to the window for a final look. White and crisp lay the path, chequered by the dark defined shadows of the trees ; above was the sky, pearly with moonlight, allowing only a few larger stars to appear, and one glorious planet. Fascinated by the silent beauty, she stood gazing, wishing she could distinguish Jupiter's moons, observing on the difference between his steady reflected brilliance and the sun like glories of Arcturus and Aldebaran, and passing on to the moral Miss Charlecote loved, of the stars being with us all day unseen, like the great cloud of witnesses. She hoped Miss Charlecote saw that moon ; for sunrise or set, rainbow, evening gleam, new moon, or shooting star, gave Phœbe double pleasure by comparing notes with Miss Charlecote, and though that lady was absent, helping Mrs. Saville to tend her husband's mortal sickness, it was likely that she might be watching and admiring this same fair moon. Well that there are many girls who, like Phœbe, can look forth on the Creator's glorious handiwork as such, in peace and soothing, 'in maiden meditation fancy free,' instead of linking these heavenly objects to the feverish fancies of troubled hearts !

Phœbe was just turning from the window, when she heard wheels sounding on the frosty drive, and presently a carriage appeared, the shadow spectrally lengthened on the slope of the whitened bank. All at once it stopped where the roads diverged to the front and back entrances, a black figure alighted, took out a bag, dismissed the vehicle, and took the path to the offices. Phœbe's heart throbbed. It was Robert !

As he disappeared, she noiselessly opened her door,

guardedly passed the baize door of the west wing, descended the stairs, and met him in the hall. Neither spoke till they were in the library, which had been kept prepared for the travellers. Robert pressed her to him and kissed her fervently, and she found voice to say, 'What is it? Papa?'

'Yes,' said Robert.

She needed not to ask the extent of the calamity. She stood looking in his face, while, the beginning once made, he spoke in low, quick accents. 'Paralysis. Last night. He was insensible when Edwards called him this morning. Nothing could be done. It was over by three this afternoon.'

'Where?' asked Phœbe, understanding, but not yet feeling.

'At his rooms at the office. He had spent the evening there alone. It was not known till eight this morning. I was there instantly, Mervyn and Bevil soon after, but he knew none of us. Mervyn thought I had better come here. Oh, Phœbe, my mother!'

'I will see if she have heard anything,' said Phœbe, moving quietly off, as one in a dream, able to act, move, and decide, though not to think.

She found the household in commotion. Robert had spoken to the butler, and everywhere were knots of whisperers. Miss Fennimore met Phœbe with her eyes full of tears, tears as yet far from those of Phœbe herself. 'Your mother has heard nothing,' she said. 'I ascertained that from Boodle, who only left her dressing-room since your brother's arrival. You had better let her have her night's rest.'

Robert, who had followed Phœbe, hailed this as a reprieve, and thanked Miss Fennimore, adding the few particulars he had told his sister. 'I hope the girls are asleep,' he said.

'Sound asleep, I trust,' said Miss Fennimore. 'I will take care of them,' and laying her hand on Phœbe's shoulder, she suggested to her that her brother had probably not eaten all day, then left them

to return to the library together. There had been more time for Robert to look the thought in the face than his sister. He was no longer freshly stunned. He really needed food, and ate in silence, while she mechanically waited on him. At last he looked up, saying, 'I am thankful. A few months ago, how could I have borne it?'

'I have been sure he understood you better of late,' said Phœbe.

'Sunday week was one of the happiest days I have spent for years. Imagine my surprise at seeing him and Acton in the church. They took luncheon with us, looked into the schools, went to evening service, and saw the whole concern. He was kinder than ever I knew him, and Acton says he expressed himself as much pleased. I owe a great deal to Bevil Acton, and, I know, to you. Now I know that he had forgiven me.'

'You, Robin! There was nothing to forgive. I can fancy poor Mervyn feeling dreadfully, but you, always dutiful except for the higher duty!'

'Hush, Phœbe! Mine was grudging service. I loved opposition, and there was an evil triumph in the annoyance I gave.'

'You are not regretting your work. O no!'

'Not the work, but the manner! Oh! that the gift of the self-willed son be not Corban.'

'Robert! indeed you had his approval! You told me so. He was seeing things differently. It was so new to him that his business could be thought hurtful, that he was displeased at first, or, rather, Mervyn made him seem more displeased than he was.'

'You only make me the more repent! Had I been what I ought at home, my principles would have been very differently received!'

'I don't know,' said Phœbe; 'there was little opportunity. We have been so little with them.'

'Oh! Phœbe, it is a miserable thing to have always lived at such a distance from them, that I should better

know how to tell such tidings to any old woman in my district than to my mother !'

Their consultations were broken by Miss Fennimore coming to insist on Phœbe's sleeping, in preparation for the trying morrow. Robert was thankful for her heedfulness, and owned himself tired, dismissing his sister with a blessing that had in it a tone of protection.

How changed was Phœbe's peaceful chamber in her eyes. Nothing had altered, but a fresh act in her life had begun—the first sorrow had fallen on her.

She would have knelt on for hours, leaning dreamily on the new sense of the habitual words, 'Our Father,' had not Miss Fennimore come kindly and tenderly to undress her, insisting on her saving herself, and promising not to let her oversleep herself, treating her with wise and soothing affection, and authority that was most comfortable.

Little danger was there of her sleeping too late. All night long she lay, with dry and open eyes, while the fire, groaning, sank together, and faded into darkness, and the moonbeams retreated slowly from floor to wall, and were lost as grey cold dawn began to light the window. Phœbe had less to reproach herself with than any one of Mr. Fulmort's children, save the poor innocent, Maria; but many a shortcoming, many a moment of impatience or discontent, many a silent impulse of blame, were grieved over, and every kindness she had received shot through her heart with mournful gladness and warmth, filling her with yearning for another embrace, another word, or even that she had known that the last good-bye had been the last, that she might have prized it—oh, how intensely!

Then came anxious imaginings for the future, such as would not be stilled by the knowledge that all would settle itself over her head. There were misgivings whether her mother would be properly considered, fears of the mutual relations between her brothers, a sense that the family bond was loosed, and confusion and jarring

might ensue ; but, as her mind recoiled from the shoals and the gloom, the thought revived of the Pilot amid the waves of this troublesome world. She closed her eyes for prayer, but not for sleep. Repose even more precious and soothing than slumber was granted—the repose of confidence in the Everlasting Arms, and of confiding to them all the feeble and sorrowful with whom she was linked. It was as though (in the words of her own clasped book) her God were *more* to her than ever, truly a very *present* Help in trouble ; and, as the dawn brightened for a day so unlike all others, her heart trembled less, and she rose up with eyes heavy and limbs weary, but better prepared for the morning's ordeal than even by sleep ending in a wakening to the sudden shock.

When Miss Fennimore vigilantly met her on leaving her room, and surveyed her anxiously, to judge of her health and powers, there was a serious, sweet collectedness in air and face that struck the governess with loving awe and surprise.

The younger girls had known their father too little to be much affected by the loss. Maria stared in round-eyed amaze, and Bertha, though subdued and shocked for a short space, revived into asking a torrent of questions, culminating in 'Should they do any lessons?' Whereto Miss Fennimore replied with a decided affirmative, and, though Phœbe's taste disapproved, she saw that it was wiser not to interfere.

Much fatigued, Robert slept late, but joined his sister long before the dreaded moment of hearing their mother's bell. They need not have been fearful of the immediate effect ; Mrs. Fulmort's perceptions were tardy, and the endeavours at preparation were misunderstood, till it was needful to be explicit. A long stillness followed, broken at last by Phœbe's question, whether she would not see Robert. 'Not till I am up, my dear,' she answered, in an injured voice ; 'do, pray, see whether Boodle is coming with my warm water.'

Her mind was not yet awake to the stroke, and was

lapsing into its ordinary mechanical routine ; her two breakfasts, and protracted dressing, occupied her for nearly two hours, after which she did not refuse to see her son, but showed far less emotion than he did, while he gave the details of the past day. Her dull, apathetic gaze was a contrast with the young man's gush of tears, and the caresses that Phœbe lavished on her listless hand. Phœbe proposed that Robert should read to her—she assented, and soon dozed, awaking to ask plaintively for Boodle and her afternoon cup of tea.

So passed the following days, her state nearly the same, and her interest apparently feebly roused by the mourning, but by nothing else. She did not like that Phœbe should leave her, but was more at ease with her maid than her son, and, though he daily came to sit with her and read to her, he was grieved to be unable to be of greater use, while he could seldom have Phœbe to himself. Sorely missing Miss Charlecote, he took his meals in the west wing, where his presence was highly appreciated, though he was often pained by Bertha's levity and Maria's imbecility. The governess treated him with marked esteem and consideration, strikingly dissimilar to the punctilious, but almost contemptuous, courtesy of her behaviour to the other gentlemen of the family, and, after her pupils were gone to bed, would fasten upon him for a discussion such as her soul delighted in, and his detested. Secure of his ground, he was not sure of his powers of reasoning with an able lady of nearly double his years, and more than double his reading and readiness of speech, yet he durst not retreat from argument, lest he should seem to yield the cause that he was sworn to maintain, 'in season and out of season.' It was hard that his own troubles and other people's should alike bring him in for controversy on all the things that end in 'ism.'

He learnt by letter from Sir Bevil Acton that his father had been much struck by what he had seen in Cecily-row, and had strongly expressed his concern that Robert had been allowed to strip himself for the

sake of a duty, which, if it were such at all, belonged more to others. There might have been wrongheaded haste in the action, but if such new-fangled arrangements had become requisite, it was unfair that one member of the family alone should bear the whole burthen. Sir Bevil strongly supported this view, and Mr. Fulmort had declared himself confirmed in his intention of making provision for his son in his will, as well as of giving him a fair allowance at present. There must have been warnings of failing health of which none had been made aware, for Mr. Fulmort had come to town partly to arrange for the safe guardianship of poor Maria and her fortune. An alteration in his will upon the death of one of the trustees had been too long neglected, and perhaps some foreboding of the impending malady had urged him at last to undertake what had been thus deferred. Each of the daughters was to have 10,000*l.*, the overplus being divided between them and their eldest brother, who would succeed both to the business, and on his mother's death to the Beauchamp estate, while the younger had already received an ample portion as heir to his uncle. Mr. Fulmort, however, had proposed to place Robert on the same footing with his sisters, and Sir Bevil had reason to think he had at once acted on his design. Such thorough forgiveness and approval went to Robert's heart, and he could scarcely speak as he gave Phœbe the letter to read.

When she could discuss it with him after her mother had fallen asleep for the night, she found that his thoughts had taken a fresh turn.

'If it should be as Bevil supposes,' he said, 'it would make an infinite difference.' And after waiting for an answer only given by inquiring looks, he continued—'As she is now, it would not be a violent change; I do not think she would object to my present situation.'

'Oh, Robert, you will not expose yourself to be treated as before.'

‘That would not be. There was no want of attachment; merely over-confidence in her own power.’

‘Not *over* confidence, it seems,’ murmured Phœbe, not greatly charmed.

‘I understood how it had been, when we were thrown together again,’ he pursued. ‘There was no explanation, but it was far worse to bear than if there had been. I felt myself a perfect brute.’

‘I beg your pardon if I can’t be pleased just yet,’ said Phœbe. ‘You know I did not see her, and I can’t think she deserves it after so wantonly grieving you, and still choosing to forsake Miss Charlecote.’

‘For that I feel accountable,’ said Robert, sadly. ‘I cannot forget that her determination coincided with the evening I made her aware of my position. I saw that in her face that has haunted me ever since. I had almost rather it had been resentment.’

‘I hope she will make you happy,’ said Phœbe, dolefully, thinking it a pity he should be disturbed when settled in to his work, and forced by experience to fear that Lucy would torment him.

‘I do not do it for the sake of happiness,’ he returned. ‘I am not blind to her faults; but she has a grand, generous character that deserves patience and forbearance. Besides, the past can never be cancelled, and it is due to her to offer her whatever may be mine. There may be storms, but she has been disciplined, poor dear, and I am more sure of myself than I was. She *should* conform, and my work should not be impeded.’

Grimly he continued to anticipate hurricanes for his wedded life, and to demonstrate that he was swayed by justice and not by passion; but it was suspicious that he recurred constantly to the topic, and seemed able to dwell on no other. If Phœbe could have been displeased with him, it would have been for these reiterations at such a time. Not having been personally injured, she pardoned less than did either Robert or Miss Charlecote; she could not foresee peace for her

brother ; and though she might pity him for the compulsion of honour and generosity, she found that his auguries were not intended to excite compassionate acquiescence, but cheerful contradiction, such as both her good sense and her oppressed spirits refused. If he could talk about nothing better than Lucy when alone with her, she could the less regret the rarity of these opportunities.

The gentlemen of the family alone attended the funeral, the two elder sisters remaining in town, whither their husbands were to return at night. Mrs. Fulmort remained in the same dreary state of heaviness, but with some languid heed to the details, and interest in hearing from Maria and Bertha, from behind the blinds, what carriages were at the door, and who got into them. Phœbe, with strong effort, then controlled her voice to read aloud till her mother dozed as usual, and she could sit and think until Robert knocked, to summon her to the reading of the will. 'You must come,' he said ; 'I know it jars, but it is Mervyn's wish, and he is right.'

On the stairs Mervyn met her, took her from Robert, and led her into the drawing-room, where she was kindly greeted by the brothers-in-law, and seated beside her eldest brother.

As a duty, she gave her attention, and was rewarded by finding that had he been living, her hero, Mr. Charlecote, would have been her guardian. The will, dated fifteen years back, made Humfrey Charlecote, Esquire, trustee and executor, jointly with James Crabbe, Esquire, the elderly lawyer at present reading it aloud. The intended codicil had never been executed. Had any one looked at the downcast face, it would have been with wonder at the glow of shy pleasure thrilling over cheeks and brow.

Beauchamp of course remained with the heiress, Mrs. Fulmort, to whom all thereto appertaining was left ; the distillery and all connected with it descended to the eldest son, John Mervyn Fulmort ; the younger

children received 10,000*l.* a piece, and the residue was to be equally divided among all except the second son, Robert Mervyn Fulmort, who, having been fully provided for, was only to receive some pictures and plate that had belonged to his great-uncle.

The lawyer ceased. Sir Bevil leant towards him, and made an inquiry which was answered by a sign in the negative. Then taking up some memoranda, Mr. Crabbe announced that as far as he could yet discover, the brother and five sisters would divide about 120,000*l.* between them, so that each of the ladies had 30,000*l.* of her own; and, bowing to Phœbe, he requested her to consider him as her guardian. The Admiral, highly pleased, offered her his congratulations, and as soon as she could escape she hastened away, followed by Robert.

‘Never mind, Phœbe,’ he said, taking her hand; ‘the kindness and pardon were the same, the intention as good as the deed, as far as *he* was concerned. Perhaps you were right. The other way might have proved a stumbling-block.’ Speak as he would, he could not govern the tone of his voice nor the quivering of his entire frame under the downfall of his hopes. Phœbe linked her arm in his, and took several turns in the gallery with him.

‘Oh, Robin, if I were but of age to divide with you!’

‘No, Phœbe, that would be unfit for you and for me. I am only where I was before. I knew I had had my portion. I ought not to have entertained hopes so unbefitting. But oh, Phœbe! that she should be cast about the world, fragile, sensitive as she is ——’

Phœbe could have said that a home at the Holt was open to Lucilla; but this might seem an unkind suggestion, and the same moment Sir Bevil was heard impetuously bounding up the stairs. ‘Robert, where are you?’ he called from the end of the gallery. ‘I never believed you could have been so infamously treated.’

‘Hush!’ said Robert, shocked; ‘I cannot hear this said. You know it was only want of time.’

‘I am not talking of your father. He would have done his best if he had been allowed. It is your brother!—his own confession, mind! He boasted just now that his father would have done it on the spot, but for his interference, and expected thanks from all the rest of us for his care of our interests.’

‘What is the use of telling such things, Acton?’ said Robert, forcing his voice to calm rebuke, and grasping the baluster with an iron-like grip.

‘The use! To mark my detestation of such conduct! I did my best to show him what I thought of it; and I believe even Bannerman was astounded at his coolness. I’ll take care the thing is made public! I’ll move heaven and earth but I’ll get you preferment that shall show how such treatment is looked upon.’

‘I beg you will do nothing of the kind!’ exclaimed Robert. ‘I am heartily obliged to you, Acton. You gained me the certainty of forgiveness, without which I should have felt a curse on my work. For the rest, I complain of nothing. I have had larger means than the others. I knew I was to look for no more. I prefer my own cure to any other; and reflection will show you that our family affairs are not to be made public.’

‘At any rate, your mother might do something. Let me speak to her. What, not now? Then I will come down whenever Phœbe will summon me.’

‘Not now, nor ever,’ said Robert. ‘Even if anything were in her power, she could not understand; and she must not be harassed.’

‘We will talk that over on our way to town,’ said Sir Bevil. ‘I start at once. I will not see that fellow again, nor, I should think, would you.’

‘I stay till Saturday week.’

‘You had better not. You have been abominably treated; but this is no time for collisions. You agree with me, Phœbe; his absence would be the wisest course.’

‘Phœbe knows that annoyance between Mervyn and

me is unhappily no novelty. We shall not revert to the subject, and I have reasons for staying.'

'You need not fear,' said Phœbe ; 'Robert always keeps his temper.'

'Or rather we have the safeguard of being both sullen, not hot,' said Robert. 'Besides, Mervyn was right. I have had my share, and have not even the dignity of being injured.'

The need of cooling his partisan was the most effective means of blunting the sharp edge of his own vexation. Hearing Mervyn cross the hall, he called to offer to take his share in some business which they had to transact together. 'Wait a moment,' was the answer ; and as Sir Bevil muttered a vituperation of Mervyn's assurance, he said, decidedly, 'Now, once for all, I desire that this matter be never again named between any of us. Let no one know what has taken place, and let us forget all but that my father was in charity with me.'

It was more than Sir Bevil was with almost any one, and he continued to pace the gallery with Phœbe, devising impossible schemes of compensation until the moment of his departure for London.

Robert had not relied too much on his own forbearance. Phœbe met her two brothers at dinner—one gloomy, the other melancholy ; but neither altering his usual tone towards the other. Unaware that Robert knew of his father's designs, nor of their prevention, Mervyn was totally exempt from compunction, thinking, indeed, that he had saved his father from committing an injustice on the rest of the family, for the sake of a fanatical tormentor, who had already had and thrown away more than his share. Subdued and saddened for the time, Mervyn was kind to Phœbe and fairly civil to Robert, so that there were no disturbances to interfere with the tranquil intercourse of the brother and sister in their walks in the woods, their paces of the gallery, or low-voiced conferences while their mother dozed.

True to his resolve, Robert permitted no reference to his late hopes, but recurred the more vigorously to his parish interests, as though he had never thought of any wife save St. Matthew's Church.

Home affairs, too, were matters of anxious concern. Without much sign of sorrow, or even of comprehension of her loss, it had suddenly rendered the widow an aged invalid. The stimulus to exertion removed, there was nothing to rouse her from the languid torpor of her nature, mental and physical. Invalid habits gave her sufficient occupation, and she showed no preference for the company of any one except Phœbe or her maid, to whose control her passive nature succumbed. At Boodle's bidding, she rose, dress, ate, drank, and went to bed; at Phœbe's she saw her other children, heard Robert read, or signed papers for Mervyn. But each fresh exertion cost much previous coaxing and subsequent plaintiveness; and when Phœbe, anxious to rouse her, persuaded her to come down stairs, her tottering steps proved her feebleness; and though her sons showed her every attention, she had not been in the drawing-room ten minutes before a nervous trembling and faintness obliged them to carry her back to her room.

The family apothecary, a kind old man, declared that there was nothing seriously amiss, and that she would soon 'recover her tone.' But it was plain that much would fall on Phœbe, and Robert was uneasy at leaving her with so little assistance or comfort at hand. He even wrote to beg his eldest sister to come for a few weeks till his mother's health should be improved; but Sir Nicholas did not love the country in the winter, and Augusta only talked of a visit in the spring.

Another vexation to Robert was the school-room. During the last few months Bertha had outgrown her childish distaste to study, and had exerted her mind with as much eagerness as governess could desire; her translations and compositions were wonders of ease and

acuteness; she had plunged into science, had no objection to mathematics, and by way of recreation wandered in German metaphysics. Miss Fennimore rather discouraged this line, knowing how little useful brain exercise she herself had derived from Kant and his compeers, but this check was all that was wanting to give Bertha double zest, and she stunned Robert with demonstrations about her 'I' and her 'not I,' and despised him for his contempt of her grand discoveries.

He begged for a prohibition of the study, but Miss Fennimore thought this would only lend it additional charms, and added that it was a field which the intellect must explore for itself, and not take on the authority of others. When this answer was reported through Phœbe, Robert shrugged his shoulders, alarmed at the hotbed nurture of intellect and these concessions to mental independence, only balanced by such loose and speculative opinions as Miss Fennimore had lately manifested to him. Decidedly, he said, there ought to be a change of governess and system.

But Phœbe, tears springing into her eyes, implored him not to press it. She thoroughly loved her kind, clear-headed, conscientious friend, who had assisted her so wisely and considerately through this time of trouble, and knew how to manage Maria. It was no time for a fresh parting, and her mother was in no state to be harassed by alterations. This Robert allowed with a sigh, though delay did not suit with his stern, uncompromising youthfulness, and he went on to say, 'You will bear it in mind, Phœbe. There and elsewhere great changes are needed. This great, disorderly household is a heavy charge. Acting for my mother, as you will have to do, how are you to deal with the servants?'

'None of them come in my way, except dear old Lieschen, and Boodle, and Mrs. Brisbane, and they are all kind and thoughtful.'

'Surface work, Phœbe. Taking my mother's place, as you do now, you will, or ought to, become aware of

the great mischiefs below stairs, and I trust you will be able to achieve a great reformation.'

'I hope—' Phœbe looked startled, and hesitated. 'Surely, Robert, you do not think I ought to search after such things. Would it be dutiful, so young as I am?'

'Perhaps you are right,' said Robert; 'only, Phœbe, Phœbe, never let toleration harden you to be indifferent to evil.'

'I hope not,' said Phœbe, gravely.

'My poor child, you are in for a world of perplexities! I wish I had not to leave you to them.'

'Every labyrinth has a clue,' said Phœbe, smiling; 'as Miss Fennimore says when she gives us problems to work. Only you know the terms of the problem must be stated before the solution can be made out; so it is of no use to put cases till we know all the terms.'

'Right, Phœbe. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

'I cannot see the evil yet,' said Phœbe; 'the trouble has brought so much comfort. That happy Sunday with you, and my own year of being with them both have been such blessings! Last year, how much worse it would have been for us all, when I scarcely knew mamma or Mervyn, and could not go about alone nor to church! And Miss Charlecote will soon come home. There is so much cause for thankfulness, that I can't be afraid.'

Robert said no more, but felt that innocent buoyancy a mystery to his lower-pitched spirit. Never very gay or merry, Phœbe had a fund of happiness and a power of finding and turning outwards the bright side, which made her a most comfortable companion.



CHAPTER III.

Happy are they that learn in Him,
Though patient suffering teach
The secret of enduring strength,
And praise too deep for speech :
Peace that no pressure from without,
No strife within can reach.

A. L. WARING.



ELL was it for Phœbe that she had been trained to monotony, for her life was most uniform after Robert left home. Her school-room mornings, her afternoons with her mother, her evenings with Mervyn, were all so much alike that one week could hardly be distinguished from another. Bertha's vagaries and Mervyn's periodical journeys to London were the chief varieties, certainly not her mother's plaintiveness, her brother's discontent, or the sacrifice of her own inclinations, which were pretty certain to be traversed, but then, as she said, something else happened that did as well as what she had wished.

One day, when Mervyn had been hunting, and had come home tired, he desired her to give him some music in the evening. She took the opportunity of going over some fine old airs, which the exigencies of drawing-room display had prevented her from practising for some time. Presently she found him standing by her, his face softer than usual. 'Where did you get that, Phœbe ?'

‘It is Haydn’s. I learnt it just after Miss Fennimore came.’

‘Play it again ; I have not heard it for years.’

She obeyed, and looked at him. He was shading his face with his hand, but he hardly spoke again all the rest of the evening.

Phœbe’s curiosity was roused, and she tried the effect of the air on her mother, whose great pleasure was her daughter’s music, since a piano had been moved into her dressing-room. But it awoke no association there, and ‘Thank you, my dear,’ was the only requital.

While the next evening she was wondering whether to volunteer it, Mervyn begged for it, and as she finished, asked, ‘What does old Gay say of my mother now?’

‘He thinks her decidedly better, and so I am sure she is. She has more appetite. She really ate the breast of a partridge to-day!’

‘He says nothing of a change?’

‘She could not bear the journey.’

‘It strikes me that she wants rousing. Shut up in a great lonely house like this, she has nothing cheerful to look at. She would be much better off at Brighton, or some of those places where she could see people from the windows, and have plenty of twaddling old dowager society.’

‘I did ask Mr. Gay about the sea, but he thought the fatigue of the journey, and the vexing her by persuading her to take it, would do more harm than the change would do good.’

‘I did not mean only as a change. I believe she would be much happier living there, with this great place off her hands. It is enough to depress any one’s spirits to live in a corner like a shrivelled kernel in a nut.’

‘Go away!’ exclaimed Phœbe. ‘Mervyn! it is her home! It is her own!’

‘Well, I never said otherwise,’ he answered, rather crossly; ‘but you know very well that it is a farce to talk of her managing the house, or the estate either. It

was bad enough before, but there will be no check on any one now.'

'I thought you looked after things.'

'Am I to spend my life as a steward? No, if the work is to be in my hands, I ought to be in possession at once, so as to take my place in the county as I ought, and cut the City business. The place is a mere misfortune and encumbrance to her as she is, and she would be ten times happier at a watering place.'

'Mervyn, what do you mean? You have all the power and consequence here, and are fully master of all; but why should not poor mamma live in her own house?'

'Can't you conceive that a man may have reasons for wishing to be put in possession of the family place when he can enjoy it, and she can't? Don't look at me with that ridiculous face. I mean to marry. Now, can't you see that I may want the house to myself?'

'You are engaged!'

'Not exactly. I am waiting to see my way through the bother.'

'Who is it? Tell me about it, Mervyn.'

'I don't mind telling you, but for your life don't say a word to any one. I would never forgive you, if you set my Ladies Bannerman and Acton at me.'

Phoebe was alarmed. She had little hope that their likings would coincide; his manner indicated defiance of opinion, and she could not but be averse to a person for whose sake he wished to turn them out. 'Well,' was all she could say, and he proceeded: 'I suppose you never heard of Cecily Raymond.'

'Of Moorcroft?' she asked, breathing more freely. 'Sir John's daughter?'

'No, his niece. It is a spooney thing to take up with one's tutor's daughter, but it can't be helped. I've tried to put her out of my head, and enter on a more profitable speculation, but it won't work!'

‘Is she very pretty—prettier than Lucilla Sandbrook?’ asked Phoebe, unable to believe that any other inducement could attach him.

‘Not what you would call pretty at all, except her eyes. Not a bit fit to make a figure in the world, and a regular little parsoness. That’s the deuce of it. It would be mere misery to her to be taken to London and made to go into society; so I want to have it settled, for if she could come here and go poking into cottages and schools, she would want nothing more.’

‘Then she is very good!’

‘You and she will be devoted to each other. And you’ll stand up for her, I know, and then a fig for their two ladyships. You and I can be a match for Juliana, if she tries to bully my mother. Not that it matters. I am my own man now; but Cecily is crotchety, and must not be distressed.’

‘Then I am sure she would not like to turn mamma out,’ said Phoebe, stoutly.

‘Don’t you see that is the reason I want to have it settled beforehand. If she were a party to it, she would never consent; she would be confoundedly scrupulous, and we should be all worried to death. Come, you just sound my mother; you can do anything with her, and it will be better for you all. You will be bored to death here, seeing no one.’

‘I do not know whether it be a right proposal to make.’

‘Right? If the place had been my father’s, it would be a matter of course.’

‘That makes the whole difference. And even so, would not this be very soon?’

‘Of course you know I am proposing nothing at once. It would not be decent, I suppose, to marry within the half year; but, poor little thing, I can’t leave her in suspense any longer. You should not have played that thing.’

‘Then you know that she cares for you?’

He laughed consciously at this home question.

‘It must be a long time since you were at Mr. Raymond’s.’

‘Eight years ; but I have made flying visits there since, and met her at her uncle’s. Poor little thing, she was horridly gone off last time, and very ungracious, but we will find a remedy!’

‘Then you could not gain consent to it?’

‘It never came to that. I never committed myself.’

‘But why not? If she was so good, and you liked her, and they all wanted you to marry, I can’t see why you waited, if you knew, too, that she liked you—I don’t think it was kind, Mervyn.’

‘Ah! women always hang by one another. See here, Phœbe, it began when I was as green as yourself, a mere urchin, and she a little unconscious thing of the same age. Well, when I got away, I saw what a folly it was—a mere throwing myself away! I might have gone in for rank or fortune, as I liked; and how did I know that I was such a fool that I could not forget her? If Charles Charteris had not monopolized the Jewess, I should have been done for long ago! And apart from that, I wasn’t ready for domestic joys, especially to be Darby to such a pattern little Joan, who would think me on the highway to perdition if she saw *Bell’s Life* on the table, or heard me bet a pair of gloves.’

‘You can’t have any affection for her,’ cried Phœbe, indignantly.

‘Didn’t I tell you that she spoilt the taste of every other transaction of the sort? And what am I going to do now? When she has not a halfpenny, and I might marry anybody!’

‘If you cared for her properly, you would have done it long before.’

‘I’m a dutiful son,’ he answered, in an indifferent voice, that provoked Phœbe to say with spirit, ‘I hope she does not care for you, after all.’

‘Past praying for, kind sister. Sincerely, I’ve been sorry for it; I would have disbelieved it, but the more

she turns away, the better I know it ; so you see, after all, I shall deserve to be ranked with your hero, Bevil Acton.'

'Mervyn, you make me so angry that I can hardly answer ! You boast of what you think she has suffered for you all this time, and make light of it !'

'It wasn't my fault if my poor father would send such an amiable youth into a large family. Men with daughters should not take pupils. I did my best to cure both her and myself, but I had better have fought it out at once when she was younger and prettier, and might have been more conformable, and not so countrified, as you'll grow, Phoebe, if you stay rusting here, nursing my mother and reading philosophy with Miss Fennimore. If you set up to scold me, you had better make things easy for me.'

Phoebe thought for a few moments, and then said, 'I see plainly what you ought to do, but I cannot understand that this makes it proper to ask my mother to give up her own house, that she was born to. I suppose you would call it childish to propose your living with us ; but we could almost form two establishments.'

'My dear child, Cecily would go and devote herself to my mother. I should never have any good out of her, and she would get saddled for life with Maria.'

'Maria is my charge,' said Phoebe, coldly.

'And what will your husband say to that ?'

'He shall never be my husband, unless I have the means of making her happy.'

'Ay, there would be a frenzy of mutual generosity, and she would be left to us. No ; I'm not going to set up housekeeping with Maria for an ingredient.'

'There is the Underwood.'

'Designed by nature for a dowager-house. That would do very well for you and my mother, though Cheltenham or Brighton might be better. Yes, it might do. You would be half a mile nearer your dear Miss Charlecote.'

‘Thank you,’ said Phœbe, a little sarcastically ; but repenting, she added, ‘Mervyn, I hope I do not seem unkind and selfish ; but I think we ought to consider mamma, as she cannot stand up for herself just now. It is not unlikely that when mamma hears you are engaged, and has seen and grown fond of Miss Raymond, she may think herself of giving up this place ; but it ought to begin from her, not from you ; and as things are now, I could not think of saying anything about it. From what you tell me of Miss Raymond, I don’t think she would be less likely to take you without Beauchamp than with it ; indeed, I think you must want it less for her sake than your own.’

‘Upon my word, Mrs. Phœbe, you are a cool hand !’ exclaimed Mervyn, laughing ; ‘but you promise to see what can be done as soon as I’ve got my hand into the matter.’

‘I promise nothing,’ said Phœbe ; ‘I hope it will be settled without me, for I do not know what would be most right or most kind, but it may be plainer when the time comes, and she, who is so good, will be sure to know. O Mervyn, I am very glad of that !’

Phœbe sought the west wing in such a tingle of emotion that she only gave Miss Fennimore a brief good night instead of lingering to talk over the day. Indignation was foremost. After destroying Robert’s hopes for life, here was Mervyn accepting wedded happiness as a right, and after having knowingly trifled with a loving heart for all these years, coolly deigning to pick it up, and making terms to secure his own consequence and freedom from all natural duties, and to thrust his widowed mother from her own home. It was Phœbe’s first taste of the lesson, so bitter to many, that her parents’ home was not her own for life, and the expulsion seemed to her so dreadful that she rebuked herself for personal feeling in her resentment, and it was with a sort of horror that she bethought herself that her mother might possibly prefer a watering-place life, and that it would then be her part to

submit cheerfully. Poor Miss Charlecote ! would not she miss her little moonbeam ? Yes, but if this Cecily were so good, she would make up to her. The pang of suffering and dislike quite startled Phœbe. She knew it for jealousy, and hid her face in prayer.

The next day was Sunday, and Mervyn made the unprecedented exertion of going twice to church, observing that he was getting into training. He spent the evening in dwelling on Cecily Raymond, who seemed to have been the cheerful guardian elder sister of a large family in narrow circumstances, and as great a contrast to Mervyn himself as was poor Lucilla to Robert ; her homeliness and seriousness being as great hindrances to the elder brother, as fashion and levity to the younger. It was as if each were attracted by the indefinable essence, apart from all qualities, that constitutes the self ; and Haydn's air, learnt long ago by Cecily as a surprise to her father on his birthday, had evoked such a healthy shoot of love within the last twenty-four hours, that Mervyn was quite transformed, though still rather unsuitably sensible of his own sacrifice, and of the favour he was about to confer on Cecily in entering on that inevitable period when he must cease to be a gentleman at large.

On Monday he came down to breakfast ready for a journey, as Phœbe concluded, to London. She asked if he would return by the next hunting day. He answered vaguely, then rousing himself, said, 'I say, Phœbe, you must write her a cordial sisterly sort of a letter, you know ; and you might make Bertha do it too, for nobody else will.'

'I wrote to Juliana on Friday.'

'Juliana ! Are you mad ?'

'Oh ! Miss Raymond ! But you told me you had said nothing ! You have not had time since Friday night to get an answer.'

'Foolish child, no ; but I shall be there to-night or to-morrow.'

'You are going to Sutton ?'

‘Yes; and, as I told you, I trust to you to write such a letter as to make her feel comfortable. Well, what’s the use of having a governess, if you don’t know how to write a letter?’

‘Yes, Mervyn, I’ll write, only I must hear from you first.’

‘I hate writing. I tell you, if you write—let me see, on Wednesday, you may be sure it is all over.’

‘No, Mervyn, I will not be so impertinent,’ said Phœbe, and the colour rushed into her face as she recollected the offence that she had once given by manifesting a brother’s security of being beloved. ‘It would be insulting her to assume that she had accepted you, and write before I knew, especially after the way you have been using her.’

‘Pshaw! she will only want a word of kindness; but if you are so fanciful, will it do if I put a cover in the post? There! and when you get it on Wednesday morning, you write straight off to Cecily, and when you have got the notion into my mother’s understanding, you may write to me, and tell me what chance there is of Beauchamp.’

What chance of Beauchamp! The words made Phœbe’s honest brow contract as she stood by the chimneypiece, while her brother went out into the hall. ‘That’s all he cares for,’ she thought. ‘Poor mamma! But, oh! how unkind. I am sending him away without one kind wish, and she must be good—so much better than I could have hoped!’

Out she ran, and as he paused to kiss her bright cheek, she whispered, ‘Good-bye, Mervyn; good speed. I shall watch for your cover.’

She received another kiss for those words, and they had been an effort, for those designs on Beauchamp weighed heavily on her, and the two tasks that were left to her were not congenial. She did not know how to welcome a strange sister, for whose sake the last of the Mervyns was grudged her own inheritance, and still less did she feel disposed to harass her mother

with a new idea, which would involve her in bewilderment and discussion. She could only hope that there would be inspiration in Mervyn's blank cover, and suppress her fever of suspense.

Wednesday came—no cover, blank or unblank. Had he been taken with a fit of diffidence, and been less precipitate than he intended? Womanhood hoped so, and rather enjoyed the possibility of his being kept a little in suspense. Or suppose he had forgotten his cover, and then should think the absence of a letter her fault? Thursday—still no tidings. Should she venture a letter to him? No; lovers were inexplicable people, and after all, what could she say? Perhaps he was only waiting for an opportunity, and if Cecily had been ungracious at the last meeting, she might not afford one. Day after day wore on, and still the post-bag was emptied in vain, and Phœbe's patience was kept on tenterhooks, till, when a full fortnight had passed, she learnt through the servants that Mr. Mervyn's wardrobe and valet, grooms and horses, had been sent for to London.

So he had been refused, and could not bear to tell her so! And here she was disappointed and pitying, and as vexed with Miss Raymond as if it had not been no more than he deserved. But poor Mervyn! he had expected it so little, and had been so really attached, that Phœbe was heartily grieved for him, and longed to know how he bore it. Nay, with all the danger of removal, the flatness of the balked excitement was personally felt, and Phœbe would have been glad, in her monotonous life, of something to hope or to fear.

Her greatest pleasure was in Miss Charlecote's return. The long watch over her old friend was over. Honor had shared his wife's cares, comforted and supported her in her sorrow, and had not left her till the move from her Parsonage was made, and she was settled among her own relations. Much as Honor had longed to be with Phœbe, the Savilles had nearer claims, and she could not part with them while there

was any need of her. Indeed, Mr. Saville, as once the husband of Sarah Charlecote, the brother-in-law of Humfrey, and her own friend and adviser, was much esteemed and greatly missed. She felt as if her own generation were passing away, when she returned to see the hatchment upon Beauchamp, and to hear of the widow's failing health. Knowing how closely Phœbe was attending her mother, Honor drove to Beauchamp the first day after her return, and had not crossed the hall before the slender black figure was in her arms.

Friends seem as though they must meet to know one another again, and begin afresh, after one of the great sorrows of life has fallen on either side, and especially when it is a first grief, a first taste of that cup of which all must drink. As much of the child as could pass from Phœbe's sweet, simple nature had passed in those hours that had made her the protector and nurse of her mother, and though her open eyes were limpid and happy as before, and the contour of the rounded cheek and lip as youthful and innocent, yet the soft gravity of the countenance was deepened, and there was a pensiveness on the brow, as though life had begun to unfold more difficulties than pleasures.

And Honor Charlecote? That ruddy golden hair, once Owen's pride, was mingled with many a silvery thread, and folded smoothly on a forehead paler, older, but calmer than once it had been. Sorrow and desertion had cut deeply, and worn down the fair comeliness of healthful middle age; but something of compensation there was in the less anxious eye, from which had passed a certain restless, strained expression; and if the face were more habitually sad, it was more peaceful. She did not love less those whom she 'had seen,' but He Whom she 'had not seen' had become her rest and her reliance, and in her year of loneliness and darkness, a trust, a support, a confiding joy had sprung up, such as she had before believed in, but never experienced. 'Her Best, her All;' those had been words of devo-

tional aspiration before, they were realities at last. And it was that peace that breathed into her fresh energy to work and love on, unwearied by disappointment, but with renewed willingness to spend and be spent, to rejoice with those who rejoiced, to weep with them that wept, to pray and hope for those who had wrung her heart.

Her tears were flowing as she tenderly embraced Phœbe, and the girl clung fast to her, not weeping, but full of warm, sweet emotion. 'Dear Miss Charlecote, now you are come, I have help and comfort!'

'Dear one, I have grieved to be away, but I could not leave poor Mrs. Saville.'

'Indeed, I know you could not; and it is better to have you now than even at the time. It is a new, fresh pleasure, when I can enjoy it better. And I feel as if we had a right to you now—since you know what I told you,' said Phœbe, with her pretty, shy, lover-like colouring.

'That you are Humfrey's ward?—my legacy from him? Good!' said Honora, ratifying the inheritance with a caress, doubly precious to one so seldom fondled. 'Though I am afraid,' she added, 'that Mr. Crabbe would not exactly recognise my claim.'

'Oh, I don't want you for what Mr. Crabbe can do for us, but it does make me feel right and at ease in telling you of what might otherwise seem too near home. But he was intended to have taken care of us all, and you always seem to me one with him——'

Phœbe stopped short, startled at the deep, bright, girlish blush on her friend's cheek, and fearing to have said what she ought not; but Honor, recovering in a moment, gave a strange bright smile and tightly squeezed her hand. 'One with him! Dear Phœbe, thank you. It was the most undeserved, unrequited honour of my life that he would have had it so. Yes, I see how you look at me in wonder, but it was my misfortune not to know on whom or what to set my affections till too late. No; don't try to repent of

your words. They are a great pleasure to me, and I delight to include you in the charges I had from him—the nice children he liked to meet in the woods.’

‘Ah! I wish I could remember those meetings. Robert does, and I do believe Robert’s first beginning of love and respect for what was good was connected with his fondness for Mr. Charlecote.’

‘I always regard Bertha as a godchild inherited from him, like Charlecote Raymond, whom I saw ordained last week. I could not help going out of my way when I found I might be present, and take his sister Susan with me.’

‘You went.’

‘Yes. Susan had been staying with her uncle at Sutton, and met me at Oxford. I am glad we were able to go. There was nothing that I more wished to have seen.’

Irrepressible curiosity could not but cause Phœbe to ask how lately Miss Raymond had been at Sutton, and as Miss Charlecote answered the question she looked inquisitively at her young friend, and each felt that the other was initiated. Whether the cousin ought to have confided to Miss Charlecote what she had witnessed at Sutton was an open question, but at least Honor knew what Phœbe burnt to learn, and was ready to detail it.

It was the old story of the parish priest taking pupils, and by dire necessity only half fulfilling conflicting duties, to the sacrifice of the good of all. Overworked between pupils and flock, while his wife was fully engrossed by children and household cares, the moment had not been perceived when their daughter became a woman, and the pupil’s sport grew to earnest. Not till Mervyn Fulmort had left Sutton for the University were they aware that he had treated Cecily as the object of his affection, and had promised to seek her as soon as he should be his own master. How much was in his power they knew not, but his way of life soon proved him careless of deserving her,

and it was then that she became staid and careworn, and her youth had lost its bloom, while forced in conscience to condemn the companion of her girlhood, yet unable to take back the heart once bestowed, though so long neglected.

But when Mervyn, declaring himself only set at liberty by his father's death, appeared at Sutton, Cecily did not waver, and her parents upheld her decision, that it would be a sin to unite herself to an irreligious man, and that the absence of principle which he had shown made it impossible for her to accept him.

Susan described her as going about the next morning looking as though some one had been killing her, but going through her duties as calmly and gently as ever, though preyed on by the misery of the parting in anger, and the threat that if he were not good enough for her, he would give her reason to think so ! Honor had pity on the sister, and spared her those words, but Phœbe had well nigh guessed them, and though she might esteem Cecily Raymond, could not but say mournfully that it was a last chance flung away.

'Not so, my dear. What is right comes right. A regular life without repentance is sometimes a more hopeless state than a wilder course, and this rejection may do him more good than acceptance.'

'It is right, I know,' said Phœbe. 'I could advise no one to take poor Mervyn ; but surely it is not wrong to be sorry for him.'

'No, indeed, dear child. It is only the angels who do not mourn, though they rejoice. I sometimes wonder whether those who are forgiven, yet have left evil behind them on earth, are purified by being shown their own errors reduplicating with time and numbers.'

'Dear Miss Charlecote, do not say so. Once pardoned, surely fully sheltered, and with no more punishment !'

'Vain speculation, indeed,' answered Honor. 'Yet I cannot help thinking of the welcome there must be

when those who have been left in doubt and fear or shipwreck come safely into haven ; above all, for those who here may not have been able to 'fetch home their banished.'

Phœbe pressed her hand, and spoke of trying whether mamma would see her.

'Ah !' thought Honora, 'neither of us can give perfect sympathy. And it is well. Had my short-sighted wish taken effect, that sweet face might be clouded by such grief as poor Cecily Raymond's.'

Mrs. Fulmort did see Miss Charlecote, and though speaking little herself, was gratified by the visit, and the voices talking before her gave her a sense of sociability. This preference enabled Phœbe to enjoy a good deal of quiet conversation with her friend, and Honora made a point of being at Beauchamp twice or three times a week, as giving the only variety that could there be enjoyed. Of Mervyn nothing was heard, and house and property wanted a head. Matters came to poor Mrs. Fulmort for decision which were unheard-of mysteries and distresses to her, even when Phœbe, instructed by the steward, did her utmost to explain, and tell her what to do. It would end by feeble, bewildered looks, and tears starting on the pale cheeks, and 'I don't know, my dear. It goes through my head. Your poor papa attended to those things. I wish your brother would come home. Tell them to write to him.'

'They' wrote, and Phœbe wrote, but in vain, no answer came ; and when she wrote to Robert for tidings of Mervyn's movements, entreating that he would extract a reply, he answered that he could tell nothing satisfactory of his brother, and did not know whether he were in town or not ; while as to advising his mother on business, he should only make mischief by so doing.

Nothing satisfactory ! What could that imply ? Phœbe expected soon to hear something positive, for Bertha's teeth required a visit to London, and Miss Fennimore

was to take her to Lady Bannerman's for a week, during which the governess would be with some relations of her own.

Phœbe talked of the snugness of being alone with her mother and Maria, and she succeeded in keeping both pleased with one another. The sisters walked in the park, and brought home primroses and periwinkles, which their mother tenderly handled, naming the copses they came from, well-known to her in childhood, though since her marriage she had been too grand to be allowed the sight of a wild periwinkle. In the evening Phœbe gave them music, sung infant-school hymns with Maria, tried to teach her piquet; and perceived the difference that the absence of Bertha's teasing made in the poor girl's temper. All was very quiet, but when good night was said, Phœbe felt wearied out, and chid herself for her accesses of yawning, nay, she was shocked at her feeling of disappointment and tedium when the return of the travellers was delayed for a couple of days.

When at length they came, the variety brightened even Mrs. Fulmort, and she was almost loquacious about some mourning pocket-handkerchiefs with chess-board borders, that they were to bring. The girls all drank tea with her, Bertha pouring out a whole flood of chatter in unrestraint, for she regarded her mother as nobody, and loved to astonish her sisters, so on she went, a slight hitch in her speech giving a sort of piquancy to her manner.

She had dined late every day, she had ridden with Sir Bevil in the Park, her curly hair had been thought to be *crépé*, she had drunk champagne, she would have gone to the Opera, but the Actons were particular, and said it was too soon—so tiresome, one couldn't do anything for this mourning. Phœbe, in an admonitory tone, suggested that she had seen the British Museum.

‘Oh yes, I have it all in my note-book. Only imagine, Phœbe, Sir Nicholas had been at Athens, and

knew nothing about the Parthenon! And, gourmet as he is, and so long in the Mediterranean, he had no idea whether the Spartan black broth was made with sepia.'

'My dear,' began her mother, 'young ladies do not talk learning in society.'

'Such a simple thing as this, mamma, every one must know. But they are all so unintellectual! Not a book about the Bannerman's house except Soyer and the London Directory, and even Bevil had never read the *Old Red Sandstone* nor Sir Charles Lyell. I have no opinion of the science of soldiers or sailors.'

'You have told us nothing of Juliana's baby,' interposed Phoebe.

'She's exactly like the Goddess Pasht, in the Sydenham palace! Juliana does not like her a bit, because she is only a girl, and Bevil quite worships her. Everything one of them likes, the other hates. They are a study of the science of antipathies.'

'You should not fancy things, Bertha.'

'It is no fancy; every one is observing it. Augusta says she has only twice found them together in their own house since Christmas, and Mervyn says it is a warning against virulent constancy.'

'Then you saw Mervyn?' anxiously asked Phoebe.

'Only twice. He is at deadly feud with the Actons, because Bevil takes Robert's part, and has been lecturing him about the withdrawing all the subscriptions!'

'What?' asked Phoebe again.

'Oh! I thought Robert told you all, but there has been such a row! I believe poor papa said something about letting Robert have an evening school for the boys and young men at the distillery, but when he claimed it, Mervyn said he knew nothing about it, and wouldn't hear of it, and got affronted, so he withdrew all the subscriptions from the charities and everything else, and the boys have been mobbing the clergy, and Juliana says it is all Robert's fault.'

‘And did you see Robert?’

‘Very little. No one would come to such an old foggy’s as Sir Nicholas, that could help it.’

‘Bertha, mydear, young ladies do not use such words,’ observed her mother.

‘Oh, mamma, you are quite behindhand. Slang is the thing. I see my line when I come out. It would not do for you, Phœbe—not your style—but I shall sport it when I come out and go to the Actons. I shall go out with them. Augusta is too slow, and lives with nothing but old admirals and *gourmands*; but I’ll always go to Juliana for the season, Phœbe, wear my hair in the Eugenie style, and be piquante.’

‘Perhaps things will be altered by that time.’

‘Oh no. There will be no retrograde movement. Highly educated women have acquired such a footing that they may do what they please.’

‘Are we highly educated women?’ asked Maria.

‘I am sure you ought to be, my dear. Nothing was grudged for your education,’ said her mother.

‘Well, then, I’ll always play at bagatelle, and have a German band at the door,’ quoth Maria, conclusively.

‘Did you go to St. Matthew’s?’ again interrupted Phœbe.

‘Yes, Bevil took me. It is the oddest place. A white brick wall with a red cross built into it over the gate, and the threshold is just a step back four or five hundred years. A court with buildings all round, church, schools, and the curates’ rooms. Such a sitting-room; the floor matted, and a great oak table, with benches, where they all dine, schoolmaster, and orphan boys, and all, and the best boy out of each class.’

‘It is a common room, like one at a college,’ explained Phœbe. ‘Robert has his own rooms besides.’

‘Such a hole!’ continued Bertha. ‘It is the worst of all the curates’ sitting-rooms, looking out into the nastiest little alley. It was a shame he did not have the first choice, when it is all his own.’

‘Perhaps that is the reason he took the worst,’ said Phœbe.

‘A study in extremes,’ said Bertha. ‘Their dinner was our luncheon—the very plainest boiled beef, the liquor given away ; and at dinner, at the Bannermans’, there were more fine things than Bevil said he could appreciate, and Augusta looking like a full-blown dahlia. I was always wanting to stick pins into her arms, to see how far in the bones are. I am sure I could bury the heads.’

Here, seeing her mother look exhausted, Phœbe thought it wise to clear the room ; and after waiting a few minutes to soothe her, left her to her maid. Bertha had waited for her sister, and clinging round her, said, ‘Well, Phœbe, aren’t you glad of us ? Have you seen a living creature ?’

‘Miss Charlecote twice, Mr. Henderson once, besides all the congregation on Sunday.’

‘Matter-of-fact Phœbe ! Perhaps you can bear it, but does not your mind ache, as if it had been held down all this time ?’

‘So that it can’t expand to your grand intellect ?’ said Phœbe.

‘It is no great self-conceit to hope one is better company than Maria ! But come, before we fall under the dominion of the Queen of the West Wing, I have a secret for you.’ Then, after a longer stammer than usual, ‘How should you like a French sister-in-law ?’

‘Nonsense, Bertha !’

‘Ah ! you’ve not had my opportunities. I’ve seen her—both of them. Juliana says the mother is his object ; Augusta, the daughter. The mother is much the most brilliant ; but then she has a husband—a mere matter of faith, for no one ever sees him. Mervyn is going to follow them to Paris, that’s certain, as soon as the Epsom day is over.’

‘You saw them !’

‘Only in the Park—oh, no ! not in a room ! Their ladyships would never call on Madame la Marquise ;

she is not received, you know. I heard the sisters talk it all over when they fancied me reading, and wonder what they should do if it should turn out to be the daughter. But then Juliana thinks Mervyn might never bring her home, for he is going on at such a tremendous rate, that it is the luckiest thing our fortunes do not depend on the business.'

Phœbe looked quite appalled, as she entered the schoolroom, not only at Mervyn's fulfilment of his threat, but at Bertha's flippancy and shrewdness. Hitherto she had been kept ignorant of evil, save what history and her own heart could tell her. But these ten days had been spent in so eagerly studying the world, that her girlish chatter was fearfully precocious.

'A little edged tool,' said Miss Fennimore, when she talked her over afterwards with Phœbe. 'I wish I could have been with her at Lady Bannerman's. It is an unsafe age for a glimpse of the world.'

'I hope it may soon be forgotten.'

'It will never be forgotten,' said Miss Fennimore. 'With so strong a relish for society, such keen satire, and reasoning power so much developed, I believe nothing but the devotional principle could subdue her enough to make her a well-balanced woman. How is that to be infused?—that is the question.'

'It is, indeed.'

'I believe,' pursued the governess, 'that devotional temper is in most cases dependent upon uncompromising, exclusive faith. I have sometimes wondered whether Bertha, coming into my hands so young as she did, can have imbibed my distaste to dogma; though, as you know, I have made a point of non-interference.'

'I should shudder to think of any doubts in poor little Bertha's mind,' said Phœbe. 'I believe it is rather that she does not think about the matter.'

'I will read Butler's *Analogy* with her,' exclaimed Miss Fennimore. 'I read it long ago, and shall be glad to satisfy my own mind by going over it again.'

It is full time to endeavour to form and deepen Bertha's convictions.'

'I suppose,' said Phœbe, almost to herself, 'that all naughtiness is the want of living faith——'

But Miss Fennimore, instead of answering, had gone to another subject.

'I have seen St. Matthew's, Phœbe.'

'And Robert?' cried Phœbe. 'Bertha did not say you were with her.'

'I went alone. No doubt your brother found me a great infliction; but he was most kind, and showed me everything. I consider that establishment a great fact.'

Phœbe showed her gratification.

'I heard him preach,' continued Miss Fennimore. 'His was a careful and able composition, but it was his sermon in brick and stone that most impressed me. Such actions only arise out of strong conviction. Now, the work of a conviction may be only a proof of the force of the will that held it; and thus the effect should not establish the cause. But when I see a young man, brought up as your brother has been, throwing himself with such energy, self-denial, and courage into a task so laborious and obscure, I must own that, such is the construction of the human mind, I am led to reconsider the train of reasoning that has led to such results.'

And Miss Fennimore's sincere admiration of Robert was Phœbe's one item of comfort.

Gladly she shared it with Miss Charlecote, who, on her side, knew more than she told Phœbe of the persecution that Robert was undergoing from a vestry notoriously under the influence of the Fulmort firm, whose interest it was to promote the vice that he came to withstand. Even the lads employed in the distillery knew that they gratified their employer by outrages on the clergy and their adherents, and there had been moments when Robert had been exposed to absolute personal danger, by mobs stimulated in the gin-shops; their violence against his attacks on their vicious prac-

tices being veiled by a furious party outcry against his religious opinions. He meanwhile set his face like a rock, and strong, resolute, and brave, went his own way, so unmoved as apparently almost to prefer his own antagonistic attitude, and bidding fair to weary out his enemies by his coolness, or to disarm them by the charities of which St. Matthew's was the centre.

As Phœbe never read the papers, and was secluded from the world's gossip, it was needless to distress her with the knowledge of the malignity of the one brother, or the trials of the other; so Honor obeyed Robert by absolute silence on this head. She herself gave her influence, her counsel, her encouragement, and, above all, her prayers, to uphold the youth who was realizing the dreams of her girlhood.

It might be that the impress of those very dreams had formed the character she was admiring. Many a weak and fragile substance, moulded in its softness to a noble shape, has given a clear and lasting impress to a firm and durable material, either in the heat of the furnace, or the ductility of growth. So Robert and Phœbe, children of the heart that had lost those of her adoption, cheered these lonely days by their need of her advice and sympathy.

Nor was she without tasks at home. Mr. Henderson, the vicar, was a very old man, and was constantly growing more feeble and unequal to exertion. He had been appointed by the squire before last, and had the indolent conservative orthodoxy of the old school, regarding activity as a perilous innovation, and resisting all Miss Charlecote's endeavours at progress in the parish. She had had long patience, till when his strength failed, she ventured to entreat him to allow her to undertake the stipend of a curate, but this was rejected with displeasure, and she was forced to redouble her own exertions; but neither reading to the sick, visiting the cottages, teaching at school, nor even setting up a night-school in her own hall, availed to supply the

want of an active pastor and of a resident magistrate.

Hiltonbury was in danger of losing its reputation as a pattern parish, which it had retained long after the death of him who had made it so. The younger race who had since grown up were not such as their fathers had been, and the disorderly household at Beauchamp had done mischief. The primitive manners, the simplicity, and feudal feeling, were wearing off, and poor Honor found the whole charge laid to her few modern steps in education! If Hiltonbury were better than many of the neighbouring places, yet it was not what it had been when she first had known it, and she vexed herself in the attempt to understand whether the times or herself were the cause.

Even her old bailiff, Brooks, did not second her. He had more than come to the term of service at which the servant becomes a master, and had no idea of obeying her, when he thought he knew best. Backward as were her notions of modern farming, they were too advanced for him, and either he would not act on them at all, or was resolved against their success when coerced. There was no dismissing him, and without Mr. Saville to come and enforce her authority, Honor found the old man so stubborn that she had nearly given up the contest, except where the welfare of men, not of crops, was concerned.

A maiden's reign is a dreary thing, when she tends towards age. And Honor often felt what it would have been to have had Owen to back her up, and infuse new spirit and vigour.

The surly ploughboy, who omitted to touch his cap to the lady, little imagined the train of painful reflections roused by this small indication of the altering spirit of the place!



CHAPTER IV.

Even in our ashes glow the wonted fires.

GREY.

MY dear, I did not like the voice that I heard just now.’
‘I am sure I was not out of temper.’
‘Indeed?’
‘Well, I am sure any one would be vexed.’

‘Cannot you tell me what was the matter without being sure so often?’

‘I am sure—there, mamma, I beg your pardon—I am sure I did not mean to complain.’

‘Only, Sarah, neither your voice had such a ring, nor are you so sure when nothing has gone wrong. What was it?’

‘It is that photography, mamma. Miss Sandbrook is so busy with it! I could not copy in my translation that I did yesterday, because she had not looked over it, and when she said she was coming presently, I am afraid I said it was always presently and never present. I believe I did say it crossly, and I am sorry I denied it,’ and poor Sarah’s voice was low and meek enough.

‘Coming? Where is she?’

‘In the dark chamber, doing a positive of the Cathedral.’

Mrs. Prendergast entered the schoolroom, outside which she had been holding this colloquy. The

powerful sun of high summer was filling the room with barred light through the Venetian blinds, and revealing a rather confused mass of the appliances of study, interspersed with saucers of water in which were bathing paper photographs, and every shelf of books had a fringe of others on glass set up to dry. On the table lay a paper of books, a three-tailed artificial minnow, and another partly clothed with silver twist, a fly-book, and a quantity of feathers and silks.

‘I must tell Francis that the schoolroom is no place for his fishing-tackle!’ exclaimed Mrs. Prendergast.

‘O, mamma, it is Miss Sandbrook’s. She is teaching him to dress flies, because she says he can’t be a real fisherman without, and the trout always rise at hers. It is quite beautiful to see her throw. That delicate little hand is so strong and ready.’

A door was opened, and out of the housemaid’s closet, defended from light by a yellow blind at every crevice, came eager exclamations of ‘Famous,’ ‘Capital,’ ‘The tower comes out to perfection,’ and in another moment Lucilla Sandbrook, in all her bloom and animation, was in the room, followed by a youth of some eighteen years, Francis Beaumont, an Indian nephew of Mrs. Prendergast.

‘Hit off at last, isn’t it, aunt? Those dog-tooth mouldings will satisfy even the uncle.’

‘Really it is very good,’ said Mrs. Prendergast, as it was held up to the light for her inspection.

‘Miss Sandbrook has bewitched the camera,’ continued he. ‘Do you remember the hideous muddles of last summer? But, oh! Miss Sandbrook, we must have one more; the sun will be off by-and-by.’

‘Only ten minutes,’ said Lucilla, in a deprecating tone. ‘You must not keep me a second more, let the sun be in ever such good humour. Come, Sarah, come and show us the place you said would be so good.’

‘It is too hot,’ said Sarah, bluntly, ‘and I can’t waste the morning.’

‘Well, you pattern-pupil, I’ll come presently. Indeed I will, Mrs. Prendergast.’

‘Let me see this translation, Sarah,’ said Mrs. Prendergast, as the photographers ran down-stairs.

She looked over it carefully, and as the ten minutes had passed without sign of the governess’s return, asked what naturally followed in the morning’s employment.

‘Italian reading, mamma ; but never mind.’

‘Find the place, my dear.’

‘It is only while Francis is at home. Oh, I wish I had not been cross.’ And though Sarah usually loved to read to her mother, she was uneasy all the time, watching the door, and pausing to listen at the most moving passages. It was full half-an-hour before the voices were heard returning, and then there was a call, ‘Directly, Sarah !’ the dark chamber was shut up, and all subsided.

Mrs. Prendergast stayed on, in spite of an imploring glance from her daughter, and after an interval of the mysterious manipulations in the closet, the photograph was borne forth in triumph.

Lucilla looked a little abashed at finding Mrs. Prendergast in presence, and began immediately, ‘There, Mr. Beaumont, you see ! I hope Mrs. Prendergast is going to banish you forthwith ; you make us shamefully idle.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Prendergast, gravely, ‘I am going to carry him off at once, and make a law against future invasions.’

Francis attempted loud appeals, but his aunt quashed them with demeanour that showed that she was in earnest, and drove him away before her.

‘Indeed, Miss Sandbrook,’ said Sarah, with affectionate compunction, ‘I did not mean to speak so loud and so crossly.’

‘My dear,’ said Lucilla, leaning back and fanning herself with her hat, ‘we all know that we reverse the laws of teacher and pupil ! Small blame to you if you were put out, and now I hope your mamma will keep

him to herself, and that I shall have time to get cool. There! read me some French, it is a refreshing process—or practise a little. I declare that boy has dragged me in and out so often, that I haven't energy to tell a noun from a verb.'

Mrs. Prendergast had hardly descended to the drawing-room before her husband's voice called her to the study, where he stood, his broad mouth distended by a broader smile, his eyes twinkling with merriment.

'Old woman,' (his favourite name for her,) 'do you know what a spectacle I have been witnessing?' and as she signed inquiry, 'Mrs. Sprydene, with numerous waggings of the head, and winkings of the eyes, inveigled me into her den, to see—guess.'

'Francis and Miss Sandbrook in the cloister photographing.'

'Old woman, you are a witch.'

'I knew what they were about, as well as Mrs. Sprydene's agony to open my eyes.'

'So your obstinate blindness drove her to me! She thought it right that I should be aware——The Close, it seems, is in a fever about that poor girl. What do you know? Is it all gossip?'

'I know there is gossip, as a law of nature, but I have not chosen to hear it.'

'Then you think it all nonsense?'

'Not *all*.'

'Well, what then? The good ladies seem terribly scandalized by her dress. Is there any harm in that? I always thought it very becoming.'

'Exactly so,' said his wife, smiling.

'If it is too smart, can't you give her a hint?'

'When she left off her mourning, she spoke to me, saying that she could not afford not to wear out what she already had. I quite agreed; and though I could wish there were less stylishness about her, it is pleasant to one's own eye, and I see nothing to object to.'

'I'm sure it is no concern of the ladies, then! And how about this lad? One of their wild notions, is not

it? I have heard her tell him half-a-dozen times that she was six years his elder.'

'Four-and-twenty is just the age that young-looking girls like to boast of. I am not afraid on her account; she has plenty of sense and principle, and I believe, too, there is a very sore spot in her heart, poor girl. She plays with him as a mere boy; but he is just at the time of life for a passion for a woman older than himself, and his devotion certainly excites her more than I could wish.'

'I'll tell you what, Peter didn't like it at all.'

'Peter was certainly not in a gracious mood when he was here last week. I could not make out whether seeing her a governess were too much for him, or whether he suspected me of ill-using her.'

'No, no; it was rivalry between him and Master Francis!' said the Doctor, laughing. 'How he launched out against young men's conceit when Francis was singing with her. Sheer jealousy! He could see nothing but dilapidation, dissent, and dirt at Laneham, and now has gone and refused it.'

'Refused Laneham!—that capital college living!—with no better dependence than his fellowship, and such a curacy as Wrapworth?'

'Indeed he has. Here's his letter. You may read it and give it to Miss Sandbrook if you like—he seems quite dispirited.'

'“Too old to enter on a new field of duties,” read Mrs. Prendergast indignantly. 'Why, he is but forty-four! What did he think of us for coming here?'

'Despised me for it,' said the Doctor, smiling. 'Never mind; he will think himself younger as he grows older—and one can't blame him for keeping to Wrapworth as long as the old Dean of —— lives, especially as those absentee Charterises do so much harm.'

'He does not expect them to give him the living? They ought, I am sure, after his twenty years' labour there already.'

'Not they! Mr. Charteris gratuitously wrote to

tell him that, on hearing of his burying that poor young Mrs. Sandbrook there, all scruples had been removed, and the next presentation was offered for sale. You need not tell Miss Sandbrook so.'

'Certainly not; but pray how does Peter mean to avoid the new field of duty, if he be sure of turning out on the Dean's death? Oh! I see—"finish his days at his College, if the changes at the University have not rendered it insupportable to one who remembers elder and better days." Poor Peter! Well, these are direful consequences of Miss Sandbrook's fit of flightiness! Yes, I'll show her the letter, it might tame her a little; and poor thing, I own I liked her better when she was soft and subdued.'

'Ha! Then you are not satisfied? Don't go. Let me know how it is. I am sure Sarah is distracted about her—more than even Francis. I would not part with her for a great deal, not only on Peter's account, but on her own and Sarah's; but these ladies have raked up all manner of Charteris scandal, and we are quite in disgrace for bringing her here.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Prendergast, 'while we lived at our dear old country home, I never quite believed what I heard of jealous ill-nature, but I have seen how it was ever since those Christmas parties, when certainly people paid her a great deal of attention.'

'Who would not?—the prettiest, most agreeable young woman there.'

'It may be vexatious to be eclipsed not only in beauty, but in style, by a strange governess,' said Mrs. Prendergast. 'That set all the mothers and daughters against her, and there have been some spiteful little attempts at mortifying her, which have made Sarah and me angry beyond description! All that they say only impels me towards her. She is a rare creature, most engaging, but I do sometimes fear that I may have spoilt her a little, for she has certainly not done quite so well of late. At first she worked hard to keep in advance of Sarah, saying how she felt the disadvantage

of superficial learning and desultory habits ; she kept in the background, and avoided amusements ; but I suppose reaction is natural with recovered spirits, and this summer she has taken less pains, and has let Francis occupy her too much, and—what I like least of all—her inattention brings back the old rubs with Sarah's temper.'

'You must take her in hand.'

'If she were but my daughter or niece !'

'I thought you had made her feel as such.'

'This sort of reproof is the difficulty, and brings back the sense of our relative positions. However, the thing is to be done as much for her sake as for our own.'

Lucilla knew that a lecture was impending, but she really loved and esteemed Mrs. Prendergast too much to prepare to champ the bit. That lady's warmth and simplicity, and, above all, the largeness of mind, that prevented her from offending or being offended by trifles, had endeared her extremely to the young governess. Not only had these eight months past without the squabble that Owen had predicted would send her to Hiltonbury in a week, but Cilla had decidedly, though insensibly, laid aside many of the sentiments and habits in which poor Honor's opposition had merely confirmed her. The effect of the sufferings of the past summer had subdued her for a long time, the novelty of her position had awed her, and what Mrs. Prendergast truly called the reaction had been so tardy in coming on that it was a surprise even to herself. Sensible that she had given cause for displeasure, she courted the *tête à tête*, and herself began thus—'I beg your pardon for my idleness. It is a fatal thing to be recalled to the two passions of my youth—fishing and photography.'

'My husband will give Francis employment in the morning,' said Mrs. Prendergast. 'It will not do to give Sarah's natural irritability too many excuses for outbreaks.'

'She never accepts excuses,' said Lucilla, 'though

I am sure she might. I have been a sore trial to her diligence and methodicalness ; and her soul is too much bent on her work for us to drag her out to be foolish, as would be best for her.'

'So it might be for her ; but, my dear, pardon me, I am not speaking only for Sarah's sake.'

With an odd jerk of head and hand, Cilly exclaimed, 'Oh ! the old story—the other f—flirting, is it ?'

'I never said that ! I never thought that,' cried Mrs. Prendergast, shocked at the word and idea that had never crossed her mind.

'If not,' said Cilla, 'it is because you are too innocent to know flirting when you see it ! Dear Mrs. Prendergast, I didn't think you would have looked so grave.'

'I did not think you would have spoken so lightly ; but it is plain that we do not mean the same thing.'

'In fact, you, in your quietness, think awfully of that which for years was to me like breathing ! I thought the taste was gone for ever, but, you see'—and her sweet, sad expression pleaded for her—'you have made me so happy that the old self is come back.' There was a silence, broken by this strange girl saying, 'Well, what are you going to do to me ?'

'Only,' said the lady, in her sweet, full, impressive voice, 'to beg you will indeed be happy in giving yourself no cause for self-reproach.'

'I'm past that,' said Lucilla, with a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye. 'I've not known that sensation since my father died. My chief happiness since that has lain in being provoking, but you have taken away that pleasure. I couldn't purposely vex you, even if I were your adopted child !'

Without precisely knowing the full amount of these words, Mrs. Prendergast understood past bitterness and present warmth, and, gratified to find that at least there was no galling at their mutual relations, responded with a smile and a caress that led Lucilla to continue—'As for the word that dismayed you, I only

meant to acknowledge an unlucky propensity to be excited about any nonsense, in which any *man* kind is mixed up. If Sarah would take to it, I could more easily abstain, but you see her coquetries are with nobody more recent than Horace and Dante.'

'I cannot wish it to be otherwise with her,' said Mrs. Prendergast gravely.

'No! It is a bad speculation,' said Lucilla, sadly. 'She will never wish half her life could be pulled out like defective crochet! nor wear out good people's forbearance with her antics. I did think they were outgrown and beat out of me, and that your nephew was too young; but I suppose it is ingrain, and that I should be flattered by the attentions of a he-baby of six months old! But I'll do my best, Mrs. Prendergast; I promise you I'll not be the schoolmistress abroad in the morning, and you shall see what terms I will keep with Mr. Beaumont.'

Mrs. Prendergast was less pleased after than before this promise. It was again that freedom of expression that the girl had learnt among the Charterises, and the ideas that she accepted as mere matters of course that jarred upon the matron, whose secluded life had preserved her in far truer refinement. She did not know how to reply, and, as a means of ending the discussion, gave her Mr. Prendergast's letter, but was amazed at her reception of it.

'Passed the living? Famous! He will stick to Wrapworth to the last gasp! That is fidelity! Pray tell him so from me.'

'You had better send your message through Dr. Prendergast. We cannot but be disappointed, though I understand your feeling for Wrapworth, and we are sorry for the dispirited tone about the letter.'

'Well he may be, all alone there, and seeing poor Castle Blanch going to rack and ruin. I could cry about it whenever I think of it; but how much worse it would have been if he had deserted too! As long as he is in the old vicarage there is a home spot to me

in the world ! Oh, I thank him, I do thank him for standing by the old place to the last.'

'It is preposterous,' thought Mrs. Prendergast. 'I wont tell the Doctor. He would think it so foolish in him, and improper in her : but I verily believe it is her influence that keeps him at Wrapworth ! He cannot bear to cross her wishes nor give her pain. Well, I am thankful that Sarah is neither beautiful nor attractive.'

Sincere was Lucilla's intention to resume her regular habits, and put a stop to Francis Beaumont's attentions, but the attraction had already gone so far that repression rendered him the more assiduous, and often bore the aspect (if it were not absolutely the coyness) of coquetry. While deprecating from her heart any attachment on his part, her vanity was fanned at finding herself in her present position as irresistible as ever, and his eagerness to obtain a smile or word from her was such an agreeable titillation, that everything else became flat, and her hours in the school-room an imprisonment. Sarah's methodical earnestness in study bored her, and she was sick of restraint and application. Nor was this likely to be merely a passing evil, for Francis's parents were in India, and Southminster was his only English home. Nay, even when he had returned to his tutor, Lucilla was not restored to her better self. Her craving for excitement had been awakened, and her repugnance to mental exertion had been yielded to. The routine of lessons had become bondage, and she sought every occasion of variety, seeking to outshine and dazzle the ladies of Southminster, playing off Castle Blanch fascinations on curates and minor canons, and sometimes flying at higher game, even beguiling the Dean himself into turning over her music when she sang.

She had at first, by the use of all her full-grown faculties, been just able to keep sufficiently ahead of her pupil ; but her growing indolence soon caused her to slip back, and not only did she let Sarah shoot ahead

of her, but she became impatient of the girl's habits of accuracy and research ; she would give careless and vexatious answers, insist petulantly on correcting by the ear, make light of Sarah and her grammar, and hastily reject or hurry from the maps, dictionaries, and cyclopædias with which Sarah's training had taught her to read and learn. But her dislike of trouble in supporting an opinion did not make her the less pertinacious in upholding it, and there were times when she was wrathful and petulant at Sarah's presumption in maintaining the contrary, even with all the authorities in the bookshelves to back her.

Sarah's temper was not her prime quality, and alterations began to run high. Each dispute that took place only prepared the way for another, and Mrs. Prendergast, having taken a governess chiefly to save her daughter from being fretted by interruptions, found that her annoyances were tenfold increased, and irritations were almost habitual. They were the more disappointing because the girl preserved through them all such a passionate admiration for her beautiful and charming little governess, that, except in the very height of a squabble, she still believed her perfection, and was her most vehement partisan, even when the wrong had been chiefly on the side of the teacher.

On the whole, in spite of this return to old faults, Lucilla was improved by her residence at Southminster. Defiance had fallen into disuse, and the habit of respect and affection had softened her and lessened her pride ; there was more devotional temper, and a greater desire after a religious way of life. It might be that her fretfulness was the effect of an uneasiness of mind, which was more hopeful than her previous fierce self-satisfaction, and that her aberrations were the last efforts of old evil habits to re-establish their grasp by custom, when her heart was becoming detached from them.

Be that as it might, Mrs. Prendergast's first duty was to her child, her second to the nephew entrusted

to her, and love and pity as she might, she felt that to retain Lucilla was leading all into temptation. Her husband was slow to see the verification of her reluctant opinion, but he trusted to her, and it only remained to part as little harshly or injuriously as might be.

An opening was afforded when, in October, Mrs. Prendergast was entreated by the widow of one of her brothers to find her a governess for two girls of twelve and ten, and two boys younger. It was at a country-house, so much secluded that such temptations as at Southminster were out of reach, and the younger pupils were not likely to try her temper in the same way as Sarah had done.

So Mrs. Prendergast tenderly explained that Sarah, being old enough to pursue her studies alone, and her sister, Mrs. Willis Beaumont, being in distress for a governess, it would be best to transfer Miss Sandbrook to her. Lucilla turned a little pale, but gave no other sign, only answering, 'Thank you,' and 'Yes,' at fit moments, and acceding to everything, even to her speedy departure at the end of a week.

She left the room in silence, more stunned than even by Robert's announcement, and with less fictitious strength to brave the blow that she had brought on herself. She repaired to the school-room, and leaning her brow against the window-pane, tried to gather her thoughts, but scarcely five minutes had passed before the door was thrown back, and in rushed Sarah, passionately exclaiming—

'It's my fault! It's all my fault! Oh, Miss Sandbrook, dearest Miss Sandbrook, forgive me! Oh! my temper! my temper! I never thought—I'll go to papa! I'll tell him it is my doing! He will never—never be so unjust and cruel!'

'Sarah, stand up; let me go, please,' said Lucy, unclasping the hands from her waist. 'This is not right. Your father and mother both think the same, and so do I. It is just that I should go—'

‘You shan’t say so ! It is my crossness ! I wont let you go. I’ll write to Peter ! He wont let you go !’ Sarah* was really beside herself with despair, and as her mother advanced, and would have spoken, turned round sharply, ‘Don’t, don’t, mamma ; I wont come away unless you promise not to punish her for my temper. You have minded those horrid, wicked, gossiping ladies. I didn’t think you would !’

‘Sarah,’ said Lucilla, resolutely, ‘going mad in this way just shows that I am doing you no good. You are not behaving properly to your mother.’

‘She never acted unjustly before.’

‘That is not for you to judge, in the first place ; and in the next, she acts justly. I feel it. Yes, Sarah, I do ; I have not done my duty by you, and have quarrelled with you when your industry shamed me. All my old bad habits are come back, and your mother is right to part with me.’

‘There ! there, mamma ; do you hear that ?’ sobbed Sarah, imploringly. ‘When she speaks in that way, can you still—? Oh ! I know I was disrespectful, but you can’t—you can’t think that was her fault !’

‘It was,’ said Lucilla, looking at Mrs. Prendergast. ‘I know she has lost the self-control she once had. Sarah, this is of no use. I would go now, if your mother begged me to stay—and that,’ she added, with her firm smile, ‘she is too wise to do. If you do not wish to pain me, and put me to shame, do not let me have any more such exhibitions.’

Pale, ashamed, discomfited, Sarah turned away, and not yet able to govern herself, rushed into her room.

‘Poor Sarah !’ said her mother. ‘You have rare powers of making your pupils love you, Miss Sandbrook.’

‘If it were for their good,’ sighed Lucilla.

‘It has been much for her good ; she is far less uncouth, and less exclusive. And it will be more so, I hope. You will still be her friend, and we shall often see you here.’

Lucilla's tears were dropping fast ; and looking up, she said with difficulty—' Don't mind this ; I know it is right ; I have not deserved the happy home you have given me here. Where I am less happy, I hope I may keep a better guard on myself. I thought the old ways had been destroyed, but they are too strong still, and I ought to suffer for them.'

Never in all her days had Lucilla spoken so humbly !



CHAPTER V.

Though she's as like to this one as a crab is like to an apple, I can tell what I can tell.—*King Lear*.

OFTEN a first grief, where sorrow has hitherto been a stranger, is but the foretaste to many another, like the first hail-storm, after long sunshine, preluding a succession of showers, the clouds returning after the rain, and obscuring the sky of life for many a day.

Those who daily saw Mrs. Fulmort scarcely knew whether to attribute her increasing invalidism to debility or want of spirits ; and hopes were built on summer heat, till, when it came, it prostrated her strength, and at last, when some casual ailment had confined her to bed, there was no rally. All took alarm ; a physician was called in, and the truth was disclosed. There was no formed disease ; but her husband's death, though apparently hardly comprehended, had taken away the spring of life, and she was withering like a branch severed from the stem. Remedies did but disturb her torpor by feverish symptoms that hastened her decline, and Dr. Martyn privately told Miss Charlecote that the absent sons and daughters ought to be warned that the end might be very near.

Honor, as lovingly and gently as possible, spoke to Phœbe. The girl's eyes filled with tears, but it was in an almost well-pleased tone that she said, 'Dear mamma, I always knew she felt it.'

‘Ah! little did we think how deeply went the stroke that showed no wound!’

‘Yes! She felt that she was going to him. We could never have made her happy here.’

‘You are content, my unselfish one?’

‘Don’t talk to me about myself, please!’ implored Phœbe. ‘I have too much to do for that. What did he say? That the others should be written to? I will take my case and write in mamma’s room.’

Immediate duty was her refuge from anticipation, gentle tendance from the sense of misery, and, though her mother’s restless feebleness needed constant waiting on, her four notes were completed before post-time. Augusta was eating red mullet in Guernsey, Juliana was on a round of visits in Scotland, Mervyn was supposed to be at Paris, Robert alone was near at hand.

At night, Phœbe sent Boodle to bed; but Miss Fennimore insisted on sharing her pupil’s watch. At first there was nothing to do; the patient had fallen into a heavy slumber, and the daughter sat by the bed, the governess at the window, unoccupied save by their books. Phœbe was reading Miss Maurice’s invaluable counsels to the nurses of the dying. Miss Fennimore had the Bible. It was not from a sense of appropriateness, as in pursuance of her system of re-examination. Always admiring the Scripture in a patronizing temper, she had gloried in critical inquiry, and regarded plenary inspiration as a superstition, covering weak points by pretensions to infallibility. But since her discussions with Robert, and her readings of Butler with Bertha, she had begun to weigh for herself the internal, intrinsic evidence of Divine origin, above all, in the Gospels, which, to her surprise, enchained her attention and investigation, as she would have thought beyond the power of such simple words.

Pilate’s question, ‘What is truth?’ was before her. To her it was a link of evidence. Without even granting that the writer was the fisherman he professed to be,

what, short of Shaksperian intuition, could thus have depicted the Roman of the early Empire in equal dread of Cæsar and of the populace, at once unscrupulous and timid, condemning Jewish prejudice, yet, with lingering mythological superstition, trembling at the hint of a present Deity in human form ; and, lost in the bewilderment of the later Greek philosophy, greeting the word *truth* with the startled inquiry, what it might be. What *is* truth ? It had been the question of Miss Fennimore's life, and she felt a blank and a disappointment as it stood unanswered. A movement made her look up. Phœbe was raising her mother, and Miss Fennimore was needed to support the pillows.

‘Phœbe, my dear, are you here ?’

‘Yes, dear mamma, I always am.’

‘Phœbe, my dear, I think I am soon going. You have been a good child, my dear ; I wish I had done more for you all.’

‘Dear mamma, you have always been so kind.’

‘They didn't teach me like Honora Charlecote,’ she faltered on ; ‘but I always did as your poor papa told me. Nobody ever told me how to be religious, and your poor papa would not have liked it. Phœbe, you know more than I do. You don't think God will be hard with me, do you ? I am such a poor creature ; but there is the Blood that takes away sin.’

‘Dear mother, that is the blessed trust.’

‘The *Truth*,’ flashed upon Miss Fennimore, as she watched their faces.

‘Will He give me His own goodness ?’ said Mrs. Fulmort, wistfully. ‘I never did know how to think about Him—I wish I had cared more. What do you think, Phœbe ?’

‘I cannot tell how to answer fully, dear mamma,’ said Phœbe ; ‘but indeed it is safe to think of His great loving-kindness and mercy. Robert will be here to-morrow. He will tell you better.’

‘He will give me the Holy Sacrament,’ said Mrs. Fulmort, ‘and then I shall go——’

Presently she moved uneasily. 'Oh, Phœbe, I am so tired. Nothing rests me.'

'There remaineth a rest,' gently whispered Phœbe—and Miss Fennimore thought the young face had something of the angel in it—'no more weariness there.'

'They wont think what a poor dull thing I am there,' added her mother. 'I wish I could take poor Maria with me! They don't like her here, and she will be teased and put about.'

'No, mother, never while I can take care of her!'

'I know you will, Phœbe, if you say so. Phœbe love, when I see God, I shall thank Him for having made you so good and dear, and letting me have some comfort in one of my children.'

Phœbe tried to make her think of Robert, but she was exhausted, dozed, and was never able to speak so much again.

Miss Fennimore thought instead of reading. Was it the mere effect on her sympathies that bore in on her mind that Truth existed, and was grasped by the mother and daughter? What was there in those faltering accents that impressed her with reality? Why, of all her many instructors, had none touched her like poor, ignorant, feeble-minded Mrs. Fulmort? *

Robert arrived the next day. His mother knew him, and was roused sufficiently to accept his offices as a clergyman. Then, as if she thought it was expected of her, she asked for her younger daughters, but when they came, she looked distressed and perplexed.

'Bless them, mother,' said Robert, bending over her, and she evidently accepted this as what she wanted; but 'How—what?' she added; and taking the uncertain hand, he guided it to the head of each of his three sisters, and prompted the words of blessing from the failing tongue. Then as Bertha rose, he sank on his knees in her place, 'Bless me, bless me, too, mother; bless me, and pardon my many acts of self-will.'

‘You are good—you—you are a clergyman,’ she hesitated, bewildered.

‘The more reason, mamma ; it will comfort him.’ And it was Phœbe who won for her brother the blessing needed as balm to a bleeding heart.

‘The others are away,’ said the dying woman ; ‘maybe, if I had made them good when they were little, they would not have left me now.’

While striving to join in prayer for them, she slumbered, and in the course of the night she slept herself tranquilly away from the world where even prosperity had been but a troubled maze to her.

Augusta arrived, weeping profusely, but with all her wits about her, so as to assume the command, and provide for her own, and her Admiral’s, comfort. Phœbe was left to the mournful repose of having no one to whom to attend, since Miss Fennimore provided for the younger ones ; and in the lassitude of bodily fatigue and sorrow, she shrank from Maria’s babyish questions and Bertha’s levity and curiosity, spending her time chiefly alone. Even Robert could not often be with her, since Mervyn’s absence and silence threw much on him and Mr. Crabbe, the executor and guardian ; and the Bannermans were both exacting and self-important. The Actons, having been pursued by their letters from place to place in the Highlands, at length arrived, and Mervyn last of all, only just in time for the funeral.

Phœbe did not see him till the evening after it, when having spent the day nearly alone, she descended to the late dinner, and after the quietness in which she had lately lived, and with all the tenderness from fresh suffering, it seemed to her that she was entering on a distracting turmoil of voices. Mervyn, however, came forward at once to meet her, threw his arm round her, and kissed her rather demonstratively, saying, ‘My little Phœbe, I wondered where you were ;’ then putting her into a chair, and bending over her, ‘We are in for the funeral games. Stand up for yourself !’

She did not know in the least what he could mean,

but she was too sick at heart to ask ; she only thought he looked unwell, jaded, and fagged, and with a heated complexion.

He handed Lady Acton into the dining-room ; Augusta, following with Sir Bevil, was going to the head of the table, when he called out, 'That's Phœbe's place !'

'Not before my elders,' Phœbe answered, trying to seat herself at the side.

'The sister at home is mistress of the house,' he sternly answered. 'Take your proper place, Phœbe.'

In much discomfort she obeyed, and tried to attend civilly to Sir Nicholas's observations on the viands, hoping to intercept a few, as she perceived how they chafed her eldest brother.

At last, on Mervyn himself roundly abusing the flavour of the ice-pudding, Augusta not only defended it, but confessed to having herself directed Mrs. Brisbane to the concoction that morning.

'Mrs. Brisbane shall take orders from no lady but Miss Fulmort, while she is in my house,' thundered Mervyn.

Phœbe, in agony, began to say, she knew not what, to Sir Bevil, and he seconded her with equal vehemence and incoherency, till by the time they knew what they were talking of, they were with much interest discussing his little daughter, scarcely turning their heads from one another, till, in the midst of dessert, the voice of Juliana was heard,—'Sir Bevil, Sir Bevil, if you can spare me any attention—What was the name of that person at Hampstead that your sister told me of?'

'That person ! What, where poor Anne Acton was boarded ? Dr. Graham, he called himself, but I don't believe he was a physician. Horrid vulgar fellow !'

'Excellent for the purpose, though,' continued Lady Acton, addressing herself as before to Mr. Crabbe ; 'advertises for nervous or deficient ladies, and boards them on very fair terms : would take her quite off our hands.'

Phœbe turned a wild look of imploring interrogation on Sir Bevil, but a certain family telegraph had electrified him, and his eyes were on the grapes that he was eating with nervous haste. Her blood boiling at what she apprehended, Phœbe could endure her present post no longer, and starting up, made the signal for leaving the dinner-table so suddenly that Augusta choked upon her glass of wine, and carried off her last macaroon in her hand. Before she had recovered breath to rebuke her sister's precipitation, Phœbe, with boldness and spirit quite new to the sisters, was confronting Juliana, and demanding what she had been saying about Hampstead.

'Only,' said Juliana, coolly, 'that I have found a capital place there for Maria—a Doctor Graham, who boards and lodges such unfortunates. Sir Bevil had an idiot cousin there who died. I shall write to-morrow.'

'I promised that Maria should not be separated from me,' said Phœbe.

'Nonsense, my dear,' said Augusta; 'we could not receive her; she can never be made presentable.'

'You?' said Phœbe.

'Yes, my dear; did you not know? You go home with us the day after to-morrow; and next spring I mean to bring you out, and take you everywhere. The Admiral is so generous!'

'But the others?' said Phœbe.

'I don't mind undertaking Bertha,' said Lady Acton. 'I know of a good school for her, and I shall deposit Maria at Dr. Graham's as soon as I can get an answer.'

'Really,' continued Augusta, 'Phœbe will look very creditable by-and-by, when she has more colour, and not all this crape. Perhaps I shall get her married by the end of the season; only you must learn better manners first, Phœbe—not to rush out of the dining-room in this way. I don't know what I shall do without my other glass of wine—when I am so low, too!'

‘A fine mistress of the house, indeed,’ said Lady Acton. ‘It is well Mervyn’s absurd notion is impossible.’

‘What was that? To keep us all?’ asked Phœbe, catching at the hope.

‘Not Maria nor the governess. You need not flatter yourself,’ said Juliana; ‘he said he wouldn’t have them at any price; and as to keeping house alone with a man of his character, even you may have sense to see it couldn’t be for a moment.’

‘Did Robert consent to Maria’s going to Hampstead?’ asked Phœbe.

‘Robert—what has he to do with it? He has no voice!’

‘He said something about getting the three boarded with some clergyman’s widow,’ said Augusta; ‘buried in some hole, I suppose, to make them like himself—go to church every day, and eat cold dinners on Sunday.’

‘I should like to see Bertha doing that,’ said Juliana, laughing.

But the agony of helplessness that had oppressed Phœbe was relieved. She saw an outlet, and could form a resolution. Home might have to be given up, but there was a means of fulfilling her mother’s charge, and saving Maria from the private idiot asylum; and for that object Phœbe was ready to embrace perpetual seclusion with the dullest of widows. She found her sisters discussing their favourite subject—Mervyn’s misconduct and extravagance—and she was able to sit apart, working, and thinking of her line of action. Only two days! She must be prompt, and not wait for privacy or for counsel. So, when the gentlemen came in, and Mr. Crabbe came towards her, she took him into the window, and asked him if any choice were permitted her as to her residence.

‘Certainly; so nearly of age as you are. But I naturally considered that you would wish to be with Lady Bannerman, with all the advantages of London society.’

‘But she will not receive Maria. I promised that Maria should be my charge. You have not consented to this Hampstead scheme?’

‘Her Ladyship is precipitate,’ half whispered the lawyer. ‘I certainly would not, till I had seen the establishment, and judged for myself.’

‘No, nor then,’ said Phœbe. ‘Come to-morrow, and see her. She is no subject for *an establishment*. And I beg you will let me be with her; I would much prefer being with any lady who would receive us both.’

‘Very amiable,’ said Mr. Crabbe.

‘Ha!’ interrupted Mervyn, ‘you are not afraid I shall let Augusta carry you off, Phœbe. She would give the world to get you, but I don’t mean to part with you.’

‘It is of no use to talk to her, Mervyn,’ cried Augusta’s loud voice from the other end of the room. ‘She knows that she cannot remain with you. Robert himself would tell her so.’

‘Robert knows better than to interfere,’ said Mervyn, with one of his scowls. ‘Now then, Phœbe, settle it for yourself. Will you stay and keep house for me at home, or be Augusta’s companion? There! the choice of Hercules. Virtue or vice?’ he added, trying to laugh.

‘Neither,’ said Phœbe, readily. ‘My home is fixed by Maria’s.’

‘Phœbe are you crazy?’ broke out the three voices; while Sir Nicholas slowly and sententiously explained that he regretted the unfortunate circumstance, but Maria’s peculiarities made it impossible to produce her in society; and that when her welfare and happiness had been consulted by retirement, Phœbe would find a home in his house, and be treated as Lady Banner-man’s sister, and a young lady of her expectations deserved.

‘Thank you,’ said Phœbe; then turning to her brother, ‘Mervyn, do you, too, cast off poor Maria?’

‘I told you what I thought of that long ago,’ said Mervyn, carelessly.

‘Very well, then,’ said Phœbe, sadly ; ‘perhaps you will let us stay till some lady can be found of whom Mr. Crabbe may approve, with whom Maria and I can live.’

‘Lady Acton!’ Sir Bevil’s voice was low and entreating, but all heard it.

‘I am not going to encumber myself,’ she answered. ‘I always disliked girls, and I shall certainly not make Acton Manor an idiot asylum.’

‘And mind,’ added Augusta, ‘you wont come to me for the season! I have no notion of your leaving me all the dull part of the year for some gay widow at a watering-place, and then expecting me to go out with you in London.’

‘By Heaven!’ broke out Mervyn, ‘they *shall* stay here, if only to balk your spite. My sisters shall not be driven from pillar to post the very day their mother is put under ground.’

‘Some respectable lady,’ began Robert.

‘Some horrid old harridan of a boarding-house keeper,’ shouted Mervyn, the louder for his interference. ‘Ay, you would like it, and spend all their fortunes on parsons in long coats! I know better! Come here, Phœbe, and listen. You shall live here as you have always done, Maria and all, and keep the Fennimore woman to mind the children. Answer me, will that content you? Don’t go looking at Robert, but say yes or no.’

Mervyn’s inuendo had deprived his offer of its grace, but in spite of the pang of indignation, in spite of Robert’s eye of disapproval, poor desolate Phœbe must needs cling to her home, and to the one who alone would take her and her poor companion. ‘Mervyn, thank you; it is right!’

‘Right! What does that mean? If anyone has a word to say against my sisters being under my roof,

let me hear it openly, not behind my back. Eh, Juliana, what's that?

'Only that I wonder how long it will last,' sneered Lady Acton.

'And,' added Robert, 'there should be some guarantee that they should not be introduced to unsuitable acquaintance.'

'You think me not to be trusted with them.'

'I do not.'

Mervyn ground his teeth, answering, 'Very well, sir, I stand indebted to you. I should have imagined, whatever your opinion of me, you would have considered your favourite sky-blue governess an immaculate guardian, or can you be contented with nothing short of a sisterhood?'

'Robert,' said Phœbe, fearing lest worse should follow, 'Mervyn has always been good to us; I trust to him.' And her clear eyes were turned on the eldest brother with a grateful confidence that made him catch her hand with something between thanks and triumph, as he said—

'Well said, little one! There, sir, are you satisfied?'

'I must be,' replied Robert.

Sir Bevil, able to endure no longer, broke in with some intelligence from the newspaper, which he had been perusing ever since his unlucky appeal to his lady. Every one thankfully accepted this means of ending the discussion.

'Well, Miss,' was Juliana's good night, 'you have attained your object. I hope you may find it answer.'

'Yes,' added Augusta, 'when Mervyn brings home that Frenchwoman, you will wish you had been less tenacious.'

'That's all an idea of yours,' said Juliana. 'She'll have punishment enough in Master Mervyn's own temper. I wouldn't keep house for him, no, not for a week.'

'Stay till you are asked,' said Augusta.

Phœbe could bear no more, but slipped through the

swing-door, reached her room, and sinking into a chair, passively let Lieschen undress her, not attempting to raise her drooping head, nor check the tears that trickled, conscious only of her broken, wounded, oppressed state of dejection, into the details of which she durst not look. How should she, when her misery had been inflicted by such hands? The mere fact of the unseemly broil between the brothers and sisters on such an evening was shame and pain enough, and she felt like one bruised and crushed all over, both in herself and Maria, while the one drop of comfort in Mervyn's kindness was poisoned by the strife between him and Robert, and the doubt whether Robert thought she ought to have accepted it.

When her maid left her, she only moved to extinguish her light, and then cowered down again as if to hide in the darkness; but the soft summer twilight gloom seemed to soothe and restore her, and with a longing for air to refresh her throbbing brow, she leant out into the cool, still night, looking into the northern sky, still pearly with the last reminiscence of the late sunset, and with the pale large stars beaming calmly down.

'Oh, mother, mother! Well might you long to take your poor Maria with you—there where the weary are at rest—where there is mercy for the weak and slow! Home! home! we have none but with you!'

Nay, had she not a home with Him Whose love was more than mother's love; Whose soft stars were smiling on her now; Whose gentle breezes fanned her burning cheeks, even as a still softer breath of comfort was stilling her troubled spirit! She leant out till she could compose herself to kneel in prayer, and from prayer rose up quietly, weary, and able to rest beneath the Fatherly Wings spread over the orphan.

She was early astir, though with heavy, swollen eyelids; and anxious to avoid Bertha's inquiries till all should be more fully settled, she betook herself to the garden, to cool her brow and eyes. She was bathing

them in the dewy fragrant heart of a full-blown rose, that had seemed to look at her with a tearful smile of sympathy, when a step approached and an arm was thrown round her, and Robert stood beside her.

‘My Phœbe,’ he said tenderly, ‘how are you? It was a frightful evening!’

‘Oh! Robert, were you displeased with me?’

‘No, indeed. You put us all to shame. I grieved that you had no more preparation, but some of the guests stayed late, afterwards I was hindered by business, and then Bevil laid hands on me to advise me privately against this establishment for poor Maria.’

‘I thought it was Juliana who pressed it!’

‘Have you not learnt that whatever he dislikes she forwards?’

‘Oh! Robert, you can hinder that scheme from ever being thought of again!’

‘Yes,’ said Robert; ‘*there* she should never have been, even had you not made resistance.’

‘And, Robert, may we stay here?’ asked Phœbe, trembling.

‘Crabbe sees no objection,’ he answered.

‘Do you, Robert? If you think we ought not, I will try to change; but Mervyn is kind, and it is home! I saw you thought me wrong, but I could not help being glad he relented to Maria.’

‘You were right. Your eldest brother is the right person to give you a home. I cannot. It would have shown an evil, suspicious temper if you had refused him.’

‘Yet you do not like it.’

‘Perhaps I am unjust. I own that I had imagined you all happier and better in such a home as Mrs. Parsons or Miss Charlecote could find for you; and though Mervyn would scarcely wilfully take advantage of your innocence, I do not trust to his always knowing what would be hurtful to you or Bertha. It is a charge that I grudge to him, for I do not think he perceives what it is.’

‘I could make you think better of him. I wonder whether I may.’

‘Anything—anything to make me think better of him,’ cried Robert eagerly.

‘I do not know it from him alone, so it cannot be a breach of confidence,’ said Phœbe. ‘He has been deeply attached, not to a pretty person, nor a rich nor grand one, but she was very good and religious—so much so that she would not accept him.’

‘How recently?’

‘The attachment has been long; the rejection this spring.’

‘My poor Phœbe, I could not tell you how his time has been passed since early spring.’

‘I know in part,’ she said, looking down; ‘but, Robin, *that* arose from despair. Oh, how I longed for him to come and let me try to comfort him!’

‘And how is this to change my opinion,’ asked Robert, ‘except by showing me that no right-minded woman could trust herself with him?’

‘Oh, Robert, no! Sisters need not change, though others ought, perhaps. I meant you to see that he does love and honour goodness for itself, and so that he will guard his sisters.’

‘I will think so, Phœbe. You deserve to be believed, for you draw out his best points. For my own part, the miserable habits of our boyhood have left a habit of acrimony, of which, repent as I will, I cannot free myself. I gave way to it last night. I can be cool, but I cannot help being contemptuous. I make him worse, and I aggravated your difficulties by insulting him.’

‘He insulted you,’ said Phœbe. ‘When I think of those words I don’t know how I can stay with him.’

‘They fell short! They were nothing,’ said Robert. ‘But it was the more unbecoming in me to frame my warning as I did. Oh, Phœbe, your prayers and influence have done much for me. Help me now to treat my brother so as not to disgrace my calling.’

‘You—when you freely forgive all the injuries he has done you!’

‘If I freely forgave, I suppose I should love;’ and he murmured sadly, ‘He that hateth his brother is a murderer.’

Phoebe shrank, but could not help thinking that if the spirit of Cain existed among them, it was not with the younger brother.

When she next spoke, it was to express her fear lest Miss Fennimore should refuse to remain, since the position would be uncomfortable. Hertalent was thrown away on poor Maria, and Bertha had been very vexing and provoking of late. Phoebe greatly dreaded a change, both from her love for her governess, and alarm lest a new duenna might be yet more unwelcome to Mervyn, and she was disappointed to see that Robert caught at the hope that the whole scheme might be baffled on this score.

Phoebe thought a repetition of the dinner-table offence would be best obviated by taking her place as tea-maker at once. Mervyn first came down, and greeted her like something especially his own. He detected the red blistered spot on her cheek, and exclaimed, ‘Eh! did they make you cry? Never mind; the house will soon be clear of them, and you my little queen. You have nothing to say against it. Has any one been putting things in your head?’ and he looked fiercely at his brother.

‘No, Mervyn; Robert and I both think you very kind, and that it is the right thing.’

‘Yes,’ said Robert, ‘no arrangement could be more proper. I am sorry, Mervyn, if my manner was offensive last night.’

‘I never take offence, it is not my way,’ said Mervyn, indifferently, almost annoyed that his brother had not spirit to persevere in the quarrel.

After the breakfast, where the elder sisters were cold and distant, and Sir Bevil as friendly as he durst, Mervyn’s first move was to go, in conjunction with Mr. Crabbe, to explain the arrangement to Miss Fennimore,

and request her to continue her services. They came away surprised and angry : Miss Fennimore would 'consider of it.' Even when Mervyn, to spare himself from 'some stranger who might prove a greater nuisance,' had offered a hundred in addition to her present exorbitant salary, she courteously declined, and repeated that her reply should be given in the evening.

Mervyn's wrath would have been doubled had he known the cause of her delay. She sent Maria to beg Robert to spare her half an hour, and on his entrance, dismissing her pupils, she said, 'Mr. Fulmort, I should be glad if you would candidly tell me your opinion of the proposed arrangement. I mean,' seeing his hesitation, 'of that part which relates to myself.'

'I do not quite understand you,' he said.

'I mean, whether, as the person whose decision has the most worth in this family, you are satisfied to leave your sisters under my charge? If not, whatever it may cost me to part with that sweet and admirable Phœbe,' and her voice showed unwonted emotion, 'I would not think of remaining with them.'

'You put me in a very strange position, Miss Fennimore ; I have no authority to decide. They could have no friend more sincerely anxious for their welfare or so welcome to Phœbe's present wishes.'

'Perhaps not ; but the question is not of my feelings nor theirs, but whether you consider my influence pernicious to their religious principles. If so, I decline their guardian's terms at once.' After a pause, she added, pleased at his deliberation, 'It may assist you if I lay before you the state of my own mind.'

She proceeded to explain that her parents had been professed Unitarians, her mother, loving and devout to the hereditary faith, beyond which she had never looked — 'Mr. Fulmort,' she said, 'nothing will approve itself to me that condemns my mother !'

He began to say that often where there was no wilful rejection of truth, saving grace and faith might be vouchsafed.

‘You are charitable,’ she answered, in a tone like sarcasm, and went on. Her father, a literary man of high ability, set aside from work by ill-health, thought himself above creeds. He had given his daughter a man’s education, had read many argumentative books with her, and died, leaving her liberally and devoutly inclined in the spirit of Pope’s universal prayer—‘Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.’ It was all aspiration to the Lord of nature, the forms, adaptations to humanity, kaleidoscope shapes of half-comprehended fragments, each with its own beauty, and only becoming worthy of reprobation where they permitted moral vices, among which she counted intolerance.

What she thought reasonable—Christianity, modified by the world’s progress—was her tenet, and she had no scruple in partaking in any act of worship ; while naturally conscientious, and loving all the virtues, she viewed the terrors of religion as the scourge of the grovelling and superstitious ; or if suffering existed at all, it could be only as expiation, conducting to a condition of high intellect and perfect morality. No other view, least of all that of a vicarious atonement, seemed to her worthy of the beneficence of the God whom she had set up for herself.

Thus had she rested for twenty years ; but of late she had been dissatisfied. Living with Phœbe, ‘though the child was not naturally intellectual,’ there was no avoiding the impression that what she acted and rested on was substantial truth. ‘The same with others,’ said Miss Fennimore, meaning her auditor himself. ‘And, again, I cannot but feel that devotion to any system of faith is the restraint that Bertha is deficient in, and that this is probably owing to my own tone. These examples have led me to go over the former ground in the course of the present spring ; and it has struck me that, if the Divine Being be not the mere abstraction I once supposed, it is consistent to believe that He has a character and will—individuality, in short—so that there might be one single revelation of absolute truth

I have not thoroughly gone through the subject, but I hope to do so ; and when I mark what I can only call a supernatural influence on an individual character, I view it as an evidence in favour of the system that produced it. My exposition of my opinions shocks you ; I knew it would. But knowing this, and thinking it possible that an undoubting believer might have influenced Bertha, are you willing to trust your sisters to me ?

‘ Let me ask one question—why was this explanation never offered before, to those who had more right to decide ?’

‘ My tenets have seldom been the subject of inquiry. When they have, I have concealed nothing ; and twice have thus missed a situation. But these things are usually taken for granted ; and I never imagined it my duty to volunteer my religious sentiments, since I never obtruded them. I gave no scandal by objecting to any form of worship, and concerned myself with the moral and intellectual, not the religious being.’

‘ Could you reach the moral without the religious ?’

‘ I should tell you that I have seldom reared a pupil from childhood. Mine have been chiefly from fifteen to eighteen, whose parents required their instruction, not education, from me ; and till I came here, I never fully beheld the growth and development of character. I found that whereas all I could do for Phœbe was to give her method and information, leaving alone the higher graces elsewhere derived, with Bertha, my efforts were inadequate to supply any motive for overcoming her natural defects ; and I believe that association with a person of my sceptical habit has tended to prevent Phœbe’s religion from influencing her sister.’

‘ This is the reason you tell me ?’

‘ Partly ; and likewise because I esteem you very differently from my former employers, and know that your views for your sisters are not like those of the persons with whom I have been accustomed to deal.’

‘You know that I have no power. It rests entirely with my brother and Mr. Crabbe.’

‘I am perfectly aware of it ; but I could not allow myself to be forced on your sisters by any family arrangement contrary to the wishes of that member of it who is most qualified to judge for them.’

‘Thank you, Miss Fennimore ; I will treat you as openly as you have treated me. I have often felt indignant that my sisters should be exposed to any risk of having their faith shaken ; and this morning, I almost hoped to hear that you did not consent to Mervyn’s scheme. But what you have said convinces me that, whatever you may have been previously, you are more likely to strengthen and confirm them in all that is good than half the people they would meet. I know that it would be a heavy affliction to Phœbe to lose so kind a friend ; it might drive her from the home to which she clings, and separate Bertha, at least, from her ; and under the circumstances, I cannot wish you to leave the poor girls at present.’ He spoke rather confusedly, but there was more consent in manner than words.

‘Thank you,’ she replied, fervently. ‘I cannot tell you what it would cost me to part with Phœbe, my living lesson.’

‘Only let the lesson be still unconscious.’

‘I would not have it otherwise for worlds. The calm reliance that makes her a ministering spirit is far too lovely to be ruffled by a hint of the controversies that weary my brain. If it be the effect of credulity, the effects are more beautiful than those of clear eyesight.’

‘You will not always think it credulity.’

‘There would be great rest in being able to accept all that you and she do,’ Miss Fennimore answered with a sigh ; ‘in finding an unchanging answer to “What is truth ?” Yet even your Gospel leaves that question unanswered.’

‘Unanswered to Pilate ; but those who are true

find the truth ; and I verily trust that your eyes will become cleared to find it. Miss Fennimore, you know that I am unready and weak in argument, and you have often left me no refuge but my positive conviction ; but I can refer you to those who are strong. If I can help you by carrying your difficulties to others, or by pointing out books, I should rejoice——’

‘You cannot argue—you can only act,’ said Miss Fennimore, smiling, as a message called him away.

The schoolroom had been left undisturbed, for the sisters were otherwise occupied. By Mr. Fulmort’s will, the jewels, excepting certain Mervyn heirlooms, were to be divided between the daughters, and their two ladyships thought this the best time for their choice, though as yet they could not take possession. Phœbe would have given the world that the sets had been appropriated, so that Mervyn and Mr. Crabbe should not have had to make her miserable by fighting her battles, insisting on her choosing, and then overruling her choice as not of sufficiently valuable articles, while Bertha profited by the lesson in harpyhood, and regarded all claimed by the others as so much taken from herself ; and poor Maria clasped on every bracelet one by one, threaded every ring on her fingers, and caught the same lustre on every diamond, delighting in the grand exhibition, and in her own share, which by general consent included all that was clumsy and ill-set. No one had the heart to disturb her, but Phœbe felt that the poor thing was an eyesore to them all, and was hardly able to endure Augusta’s compliment. ‘After all, Phœbe, she is not so bad ; you may make her tolerably presentable for the country.’

Lady Acton patronized Bertha, in opposition to Phœbe ; and Sir Bevil was glad to have one sister to whom he could be good-natured without molestation. The young lady, heartily weary of the monotony of home, was much disappointed at the present arrangement ; Phœbe had become the envied elder sister

instead of the companion in misfortune, and Juliana was looked on as the sympathizing friend who would fain have opened the prison doors that Phœbe closed against her by making all that disturbance about Maria.

‘It is all humbug about Maria,’ said Juliana. ‘Much Phœbe will let her stand in her way when she wants to come to London for the season—but I’ll not take her out, I promise her.’

‘But you will take me,’ cried Bertha. ‘You’ll not leave me in this dismal hole always.’

‘Never fear, Bertha. This plan wont last six months. Mervyn and Phœbe will get sick of one another, and Augusta will be ready to take her in—she is pining for an errand girl.’

‘I’ll not go there to read cookery books and meet old fogies. You will have me, Juliana, and we will have such fun together.’

‘When you are come out, perhaps—and you must cure that stammer.’

‘I shall die of dulness before then! If I could only go to school!’

‘I wouldn’t be you, with Maria for your most lively companion.’

‘It is much worse than when we used to go down into the drawing-room. Now we never see any one but Miss Charlecote, and Phœbe is getting exactly like her!’

‘What, all her sanctimonious ways? I thought so.’

‘And to make it more aggravating, Miss Fennimore is going to get religious too. She made me read all Butler’s *Analogy*, and wants to put me into *Paley*, and she is always running after Robert.’

‘Middle-aged governesses always do run after young clergymen—especially the most *outrés*.’

‘And now she snaps me up if I say anything the least comprehensive or speculative, or if I laugh at the conventionalities Phœbe learns at the Holt. Yesterday I said that the progress of common sense

would soon make people cease to connect dulness with mortality, or to think a serious mistiness the sole evidence of respect, and I was caught up as if it were high treason.'

'You must not get out of bounds in your talk, Bertha, or sound unfeeling.'

'I can't help being original,' said Bertha. 'I must evolve my ideas out of my individual consciousness, and assert my independence of thought.'

Juliana laughed, not quite following her sister's metaphysical tone, but satisfied that it was anti-Phoebe, she answered by observing, 'An intolerable fuss they do make about that girl!'

'And she is not a bit clever,' continued Bertha. 'I can do a translation in half the time she takes, and have got far beyond her in all kinds of natural philosophy!'

'She flatters Mervyn, that's the thing; but she will soon have enough of that. I hope he wont get her into some dreadful scrape, that's all!'

'What sort of scrape?' asked Bertha, gathering from the smack of the hope that it was something exciting.

'Oh, you are too much of a chit to know—but I say, Bertha, write to me, and let me know whom Mervyn brings to the house.'

With somewhat the like injunction, only directed to a different quarter, Robert likewise left Beauchamp.

As he well knew would be the case, nothing in his own circumstances was changed by his mother's death, save that he no longer could call her inheritance his home. She had made no will, and her entire estate passed to her eldest son, from whom Robert parted on terms of defiance, rather understood than expressed. He took leave of his birthplace as one never expecting to return thither, and going for his last hour at Hiltonbury to Miss Charlecote, poured out to her as many of his troubles as he could bear to utter. 'And,' said he, 'I have given my approval to the two schemes

that I most disapproved beforehand — to Mervyn's giving my sisters a home, and to Miss Fennimore's continuing their governess! What will come of it?'

'Do not repent, Robert,' was the answer. 'Depend upon it, the great danger is in rashly meddling with existing arrangements, especially by a strain of influence. It is what the young are slow to learn, but experience brings it home.'

'With you to watch them, I will fear the less.'

Miss Charlecote wondered whether any disappointment of his own added to his depression, and if he thought of Lucilla.



CHAPTER VI.

My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine. She has a hidden strength
Which you remember not.—*Comus.*

PHŒBE was left to the vacancy of the orphaned house, to a blank where her presence had been gladness, and to relief more sad than pain, in parting with her favourite brother, and seeing him out of danger of provoking or being provoked.

To have been the cause of strife and object of envy weighed like guilt on her heart, and the tempest that had tossed her when most needing peace and soothing, left her sore and suffering. She did not nurse her grief, and was content that her mother should be freed from the burthen of existence that had of late been so heavy; but the missing the cherished recipient of her care was inevitable, and she was not of a nature to shake off dejection readily, nor to throw sorrow aside in excitement.

Mervyn felt as though he had caught a lark, and found it droop instead of singing. He was very kind, almost oppressively so; he rode and drove with her to every ruin or view esteemed worth seeing, ordered books for her, and consulted her on improvements that pained her by the very fact of change. She gave her attention sweetly and gratefully, was always at his call, and amused his evenings with cards or music

but she felt herself dull and sad, and saw him disappointed in her.

Then she tried bringing in Bertha as entertainment for both, but it was a downright failure. Bertha was far too sharp and pert for an elder brother devoid both of wit and temper, and the only consequence was that she fathomed his shallow acquirements in literature and the natural sciences, and he pronounced her to be eaten up with conceit, and the most intolerable child he ever saw—an irremediable insult to a young woman of fifteen ; nor could Bertha be brought forward without disappointing Maria, whose presence Mervyn would not endure, and thus Phœbe was forced to yield the point, and keep in the background the appendages only tolerated for her sake.

Greatly commiserating Bertha's weariness of the schoolroom, she tried to gratify the governess and please her sisters by resuming her studies ; but the motive of duty and obedience being gone, these were irksome to a mind naturally meditative and practical, and she found herself triumphed over by Bertha for forgetting whether Lucca were Guelf or Ghibelline, putting oolite below red sandstone, or confusing the definition of ozone. She liked Bertha to surpass her ; but inattention she regarded as wrong in itself, as well as a bad example, and her apologies were so hearty as quite to affect Miss Fennimore.

Mervyn's attentions wore off with the days of seclusion. By the third week he was dining out, by the fourth he was starting for Goodwood, half inviting Phœbe to come with him, and assuring her that it was just what she wanted to put her into spirits again. Poor Phœbe—when Mr. Henderson talking to Miss Fennimore, and Bertha at the same time insisting on Decandolle's system to Miss Charlecote, had seemed to create a distressing whirl and confusion !

Miss Fennimore smiled, both with pleasure and amusement, as Phœbe asked her permission to walk to the Holt, and be fetched home by the carriage at night.

‘Don’t laugh at me,’ said Phœbe. ‘I am so glad to have some one’s leave to ask.’

‘I will not laugh, my dear, but I will not help you to reverse our positions. It is better we should both be accustomed to them.’

‘It seems selfish to take the carriage for myself,’ said Phœbe; ‘but I think I have rather neglected Miss Charlecote for Mervyn, and I believe she would like to have me alone.’

The solitude of the walk was a great boon, and there was healing in the power of silence—the repose of not being forced to be lively. Summer flowers had passed, but bryony mantled the bushes in luxuriant beauty, and kingly teasles raised their diademed heads, and exultingly stretched forth their sceptred arms. Purple heather mixed with fragrant thyme, blue harebells and pale bents of quiver-grass edged the path, and thistledown, drifting from the chalk uplands, lay like snow in the hollows, or danced like living things on the path before her. A brood of goldfinches, with merry twitter and flashing wings, flitted round a tall milk thistle with variegated leaves, and a little farther on, just at the opening of a glade from the path, she beheld a huge dragon-fly, banded with green, black, and gold, poised on wings invisible in their rapid motion, and hawking for insects. She stood to watch, collecting materials to please Miss Charlecote, and make a story for Maria.

‘Stand still. He is upon you.’

She saw Miss Charlecote a few yards off, nearly on all-fours in the thymy grass.

‘Only a grasshopper. I’ve only once seen such a fellow. He makes portentous leaps. There! on your flounce!’

‘I have him! No! He went right over you!’

‘I’ve got him under my handkerchief. Put your hand in my pocket—take out a little wide-mouthed bottle. That’s it. Get in, sir, it is of no use to bite. There’s an air-hole in the cork. Isn’t he a beauty?’

‘O the lovely green ! What saws he wears on his thighs ! See the delicate pink lining ! What horns ! and a quaint face, like a horse’s.’

“The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses.” Not that this is a locust, only a *gryllus*, happily for us.’

‘What is the difference ?’

‘Long or short horns, since Bertha is not here to make me call them antennæ. I must take him home to draw, as soon as I have gathered some willow for my puss. You are coming home with me ?’

‘I meant to drink tea with you, and be sent for in the evening.’

‘Good child. I was almost coming to you, but I was afraid of Mervyn. How has it been, my dear ?’

Phœbe’s ‘he is very kind’ was allowed to stand for the present, and Honora led the way by a favourite path, which was new to Phœbe, making the circuit of the Holt ; sometimes dipping into a hollow, over which the lesser scabious cast a tint like the grey of a cloud ; sometimes rising on a knoll so as to look down on the rounded tops of the trees, following the undulations of the grounds ; and beyond them the green valley, winding stream, and harvest fields, melting into the chalk downs on the horizon. To Phœbe, all had the freshness of novelty, with the charm of familiarity, and without the fatigue of admiration required by the show-places to which Mervyn had taken her. Presently Miss Charlecote opened the wicket leading to an oak coppice. There was hardly any brushwood. The ground was covered with soft grass and round elastic cushions of grey lichen. There were a few brackens, and here and there the crimson midsummer men, but the copsewood consisted of the redundant shoots of the old, gnarled, knotted stumps, covered with handsome foliage of the pale sea-green of later summer, and the leaves far exceeding in size those either of the sapling or the full-sized tree—vigorous playfulness of the poor old wounded stocks.

‘Ah!’ said Honor, pausing, ‘here I found my purple emperor, sunning himself, his glorious wings wide open, looking black at first, but turning out to be of purple velvet, of the opaque mysterious beauty which seems nobler than mere lustre.’

‘Did you keep him? I thought that was against your principles.’

‘I only mocked him by trying to paint him. He was mine because he came to delight me with the pleasure of having seen him, and the remembrance of him that pervades the path. It was just where Humfrey always told me the creatures might be found.’

‘Was Mr. Charlecote fond of natural history?’ asked Phœbe, shyly.

‘Not as natural history, but he knew bird, beast, insect, and tree with a friendly hearty intimacy, such as Cockney writers ascribe to peasants, but which they never have. While he used the homeliest names, a dishwasher for a wagtail, cuckoo’s bread and cheese for wood-sorrel (partly I believe to tease me), he knew them thoroughly, nests, haunts and all.’

Phœbe could not help quoting the old lines, ‘He prayeth well that loveth well both man and bird and beast.’

‘Yes, and some persons have a curious affinity with the gentle and good in creation—who can watch and even handle a bird’s nest without making it be deserted, whom bees do not sting, and horses, dogs, and cats love so as to reveal their best instincts in a way that seems fabulous. In spite of the *Lyra Innocentium*, I think this is less often the case with children than with such grown people as—like your guardian, Phœbe—have kept something of the majesty and calmness of innocence.’

Phœbe was all in a glow with the pleasure of hearing him so called, but bashful under that very delight, she said, ‘Perhaps part of Solomon’s wisdom was in loving these things, since he knew the plants from the cedar to the hyssop.’

‘And spoke of Nature so beautifully in his Song, but I am afraid as he grew old he must have lost his healthful pleasure in them, when he was lifted up.’

‘Or did he only make them learning and ornament, instead of a joy and devotion?’ said Phœbe, thinking of the difference between Bertha’s love and Miss Charlecote’s.

‘Nor does he say that he found vanity in them, though he did in his own gardens and pools of water. No, the longer I live, the more sure I am that these things are meant for our solace and minor help through the trials of life. I assure you, Phœbe, that the crimson leaf of a Herb-Robert in the hedge has broken a strain of fretful repining, and it is one great blessing in these pleasures that one never can exhaust them.’

Phœbe saw that Miss Charlecote was right in her own case, when on coming in, the grasshopper’s name and history were sought, and there followed an exhibition of the ‘puss’ for whom the willow had been gathered, namely a grass-green caterpillar, with a kitten’s face, a curious upright head and shoulders, and two purple tails, whence on irritation two pink filaments protruded,—lashes for the ichneumons, as Honora explained. The lonely woman’s interest in her quaint pet showed how thickly are strewn round us many a calm and innocent mode of solace and cheerfulness if we knew but how to avail ourselves of it.

Honora had allowed the conversation to be thus desultory and indifferent, thinking that it gave greater rest to Phœbe, and it was not till the evening was advancing that she began to discharge herself of an urgent commission from Robert, by saying, ‘Phœbe, I want you to do something for me. There is that little dame’s school in your hamlet. It is too far off for me to look after, I wish you would.’

‘Robin has been writing to me about parish work,’ said Phœbe, sadly. ‘Perhaps I ought, but I don’t know how, and I can’t bear that any change in our

ways should be observed ;' and the tears came more speedily than Honor had expected.

'Dear child,' she said, 'there is no need for that feeling. Parish work, at least in a lay family, must depend on the amount of home duty. In the last years of my dear mother's life I had to let everything go, and I know it is not easy to resume, still less to begin, but you will be glad to have done so, and will find it a great comfort.'

'If it be my duty, I must try,' said Phœbe, dejectedly, 'and I suppose it is. Will you come and show me what to do. I never went into a cottage in my life.'

I have spoken too soon ! thought Honor ; yet Robert urged me, and besides the evil of neglecting the poor, the work will do her good ; but it breaks one's heart to see this meek, mournful obedience.

'While we are alone,' continued Phœbe, 'I can fix times, and do as I please, but I cannot tell what Mervyn may want me to do when he is at home.'

'Do you expect that he will wish you to go out with him ?' asked Honora.

'Not this autumn,' she answered ; 'but he finds it so dull at home, that I fully expect he will have his friends to stay with him.'

'Phœbe, let me strongly advise you to keep aloof from your brother's friends. When they are in the house, live entirely in the schoolroom. If you begin at once as a matter of course, he will see the propriety, and acquiesce. You are not vexed ?'

'Thank you, I believe it is all right. Robert will be the more at ease about us. I only do not like to act as if I distrusted Mervyn.'

'It would not be discreet for any girl so young as you are to be entertaining her brother's sporting friends. You could hardly do so without acquiring the same kind of reputation as my poor Lucy's Rashe, which he would not wish.'

'Thank you,' said Phœbe more heartily. 'You have shown me the way out of a difficulty. I need

not go into company at all this winter, and after that, only with our old country neighbours.'

Honora was infinitely relieved at having bestowed this piece of advice, on which she had agreed with Robert as the only means of ensuring Phœbe's being sheltered from society that Mervyn might not esteem so bad for his sister as they did.

The quietness of Mervyn's absence did much for the restoration of Phœbe's spirits. The dame's school was not delightful to her; she had not begun early enough in life for ease, but she did her tasks there as a duty, and was amply rewarded by the new enjoyment thus afforded to Maria. The importance of being surrounded by a ring of infants, teaching the alphabet, guiding them round the gooseberry bush, or leading their songs and hymns, was felicity indescribable to Maria. She learnt each name, and, with the reiteration that no one could endure save Phœbe and faithful Lieschen, rehearsed the individual alphabetical acquirements of every one; she painted pictures for them, hemmed pinafores, and was happier than she had ever been in her life, as well as less fretful and more manageable, and she even began to develope more sense and intelligence in this direction than she had seemed capable of under the dreary round of lessons past her comprehension.

It was a great stimulus to Phœbe, and spurred her to personal parish work, going beyond the soup and subscriptions that might have bounded her charities for want of knowing better. Of course the worst and most plausible people took her in, and Miss Charlecote sometimes scolded, sometimes laughed at her, but the beginning was made, and Robert was pleased.

Mervyn did bring home some shooting friends, but he made no difficulties as to the seclusion that Miss Charlecote had recommended for his sister; accepting it so easily that Phœbe thought he must have intended it from the first. From that time he was seldom at home without one or more guests—an arrangement that kept

the young ladies chiefly to the west wing, and always, when in the garden, forced them to be on their guard against stumbling upon smoking gentlemen. It was a late-houred, noisy company, and the sounds that reached the sisters made the younger girls curious, and the governess anxious. Perhaps it was impossible that girls of seventeen and fifteen should not be excited by the vicinity of moustaches and beards whom they were bidden to avoid; and even the alternate French and German which Miss Fennimore enforced on Bertha more strongly than ever, merely produced the variety of her descanting on their *knebelbarten*, or on *l'heure à quelle les voix de ces messieurs-là entonnaient sur le grand escalier*, till Miss Fennimore declared that she would have Latin and Greek talked if there were no word for a gentleman in either! There were always stories to be told of Bertha's narrow escapes of being overtaken by them in garden or corridor, till Maria, infected by the panic, used to flounder away as if from a beast of prey, and being as tall as, and considerably stouter than, Phœbe, with the shuffling gait of the imbecile, would produce a volume of sound that her sister always feared might attract notice, and irritate Mervyn.

Honora Charlecote tried to give pleasure to the sisters by having them at the Holt, and would fain have treated Bertha as one of the inherited godchildren. But Bertha proved by reference to the brass tablet that she *could* not be godchild to a man who died three years before her birth, and it was then perceived that his sponsorship had been to an elder Bertha, who had died in infancy, of water on the head, and whom her parents, in their impatience of sorrow, had absolutely caused to be forgotten. Such a delusion in the exact Phœbe could only be accounted for by her tenderness to Mr. Charlecote, and it gave Bertha a subject of triumph of which she availed herself to the utmost. She had imbibed a sovereign contempt for Miss Charlecote's capacity, and considered her as embodying the passive individual who

is to be instructed or confuted in a scientific dialogue. So she lost no occasion of triumphantly denouncing all 'cataclysms' of the globe, past or future, of resolving all nature into gases, or arguing upon duality—a subject that fortunately usually brought on her hesitation of speech, a misfortune of which Miss Fennimore and Phœbe would unscrupulously avail themselves to change the conversation. The bad taste and impertinence were quite as apparent to the governess as to the sister, and though Bertha never admitted a doubt of having carried the day against the old world prejudices, yet Miss Fennimore perceived, not only that Miss Charlecote's notions were not of the contracted and unreasonable order that had been ascribed to her, but that liberality in her pupil was more uncandid, narrow, and self-sufficient than was 'credulity' in Miss Charlecote. Honor was more amused than annoyed at these discussions ; she was sorry for the silly, conceited girl, though not in the least offended nor disturbed, but Phœbe and Miss Fennimore considered them such an exposure that they were by no means willing to give Bertha the opportunity of launching herself at her senior.

The state of the household likewise perplexed Phœbe. She had been bred up to the sight of waste, ostentation, and extravagance, and they did not distress her ; but her partial authority revealed to her glimpses of dishonesty ; detected falsehoods destroyed her confidence in the housekeeper ; her attempts at charities to the poor were intercepted ; her visits to the hamlet disclosed to her some of the effects on the villagers of a vicious, disorderly establishment ; and she understood why a careful mother would as soon have sent her daughter to service at the lowest public-house as at Beauchamp.

Mervyn had detected one of the footmen in a flagrant act of peculation, and had dismissed him, but Phœbe believed the evil to have extended far more widely than he supposed, and made up her mind to

entreat him to investigate matters. In vain, however, she sought for a favourable moment, for he was never alone. The intervals between other visitors were filled up by a Mr. Hastings, who seemed to have erected himself into so much of the domesticated friend that he had established a bowing and speaking acquaintance with Phœbe ; Bertha no longer narrated her escapes of encounters with him ; and, being the only one of the gentlemen who ever went to church, he often joined the young ladies as they walked back from thence. Phœbe heartily wished him gone, for he made her brother inaccessible ; she only saw Mervyn when he wanted her to find something for him or to give her a message, and if she ventured to say that she wanted to speak to him, he promised—‘Some time or other’—which always proved *sine die*. He was looking very ill, his complexion very much flushed, and his hand heated and unsteady, and she heard through Lieschen of his having severe morning headaches, and fits of giddiness and depression, but these seemed to make him more unable to spare Mr. Hastings, as if life would not be endurable without the billiards that she sometimes heard knocking about half the night.

However, the anniversary of Mr. Fulmort’s death would bring his executor to clear off one branch of his business, and Mervyn’s friends fled before the coming of the grave old lawyer, all fixing the period of their departure before Christmas. Nor could Mervyn go with them ; he must meet Mr. Crabbe, and Phœbe’s heart quite bounded at the hope of being able to walk about the house in comfort, and say part of what was on her mind to her brother.

‘Whose writing is this ?’ said Phœbe to herself, as the letters were given to her, two days before the clearance of the house. ‘I ought to know it—It is ! No ! Yes, indeed it is—poor Lucy. Where can she be ? What can she have to say ?’

The letter was dateless, and Phœbe’s amaze grew as she read.

‘DEAR PHŒBE,

‘You know it is my nature to do odd things, so never mind that, but attend to me, as one who knows too well what it is to be motherless and undirected. Gossip is long-tongued enough to reach me here, in full venom as I know and trust, but it makes my blood boil, till I can’t help writing a warning that may at least save you pain. I know you are the snowdrop poor Owen used to call you, and I know you have Honor Charlecote for philosopher and friend, but she is nearly as unsophisticated as yourself, and if report say true, your brother is getting you into a scrape. If it is a fact that he has Jack Hastings dangling about Beauchamp, he deserves the lot of my unlucky Charteris cousins! Mind what you are about, Phœbe, if the man is there. He is plausible, clever, has no end of amusing resources, and keeps his head above water; but I *know* that in no place where there are woman-kind has he been received without there having been cause to repent it! I hope you may be able to laugh—if not, it may be a wholesome cure to hear that his friends believe him to have secured one of the heiresses at Beauchamp. There, Phœbe, I have said my say, and I fear it is cutting and wounding, but it came out of the love of a heart that has not got rid of some of its old feelings, and that could not bear to think of sorrow or evil tongues busy about you. That I write for your sake, not for my own, you may see by my making it impossible to answer.

‘LUCILLA SANDBROOK.

‘If you hold council with Honor over this—as, if you are wise, you will—you may tell her that I am learning gratitude to her. I would ask her pardon if I could without servility.’

‘Secured one of the heiresses!’ said Phœbe to herself. ‘I should like to be able to tell Lucy how I can laugh! Poor Lucy, how very kind in her to

write. I wonder whether Mervyn knows how bad the man is ! Shall I go to Miss Charlecote ? Oh, no ; she is spending two days at Moorcroft ! Shall I tell Miss Fennimore ? No, I think not, it will be wiser to talk to Miss Charlecote ; I don't like to tell Miss Fennimore of Lucy. Poor Lucy—she is always generous ! He will soon be gone, and then I can speak to Mervyn.'

This secret was not a serious burthen to Phœbe, though she could not help smiling to herself at the comical notion of having been secured by a man to whom she had not spoken a dozen times, and then with the utmost coldness and formality.

The next day she approached the letter-bag with some curiosity. It contained one for her from her sister Juliana, a very unusual correspondent, and Phœbe's mind misgave her lest it should have any connexion with the hints in Lucilla's note. But she was little prepared for what she read.

' Acton Manor, Dec. 24th.

' MY DEAR PHŒBE,

' Although, after what passed in July, I cannot suppose that the opinion of your elders can have any effect on your proceedings, yet, for the sake of our relationship, as well as of regard to appearances, I cannot forbear endeavouring to rescue you from the consequences of your own folly and obstinacy. Nothing better was to be expected from Mervyn ; but at your age, with your pretences to religion, you cannot plead simplicity, nor ignorance of the usages of the world. Neither Sir Bevil nor myself can express our amazement at your recklessness, thus forfeiting the esteem of society, and outraging the opinion of our old friends. To put an end to the impropriety, we will at once receive you here, overlooking any inconvenience, and we shall expect you all three on Tuesday, under charge of Miss Fennimore, who seems to have been about as fit as Maria to think for you. It is too late to write

to Mervyn to-night, but he shall hear from us to-morrow, as well as from your guardian, to whom Sir Bevil has written. You had better bring my jewels, and the buhl clock from my mother's mantelshelf, which I was to have. Mrs. Brisbane will pack them. Tell Bertha, with my love, that she might have been more explicit in her correspondence.

‘Your affectionate sister,

‘JULIANA ACTON.’

When Miss Fennimore entered the room, she found Phœbe sitting like one petrified, only just able to hold out the letter, and murmur—‘What does it mean?’ Imagining that it could only contain something fatal about Robert, Miss Fennimore sprang at the paper, and glanced through it, while Phœbe again faintly asked, ‘What have I done?’

‘Lady Acton is pleased to be mysterious!’ said the governess. ‘The kind sister she always was!’

‘Don’t say that,’ exclaimed Phœbe, rallying. ‘It must be something shocking, for Sir Bevil thinks so, too,’ and the tears sprang forth.

‘He will never think anything unkind of you, my dear,’ said Miss Fennimore, with emphasis.

‘It must be about Mr. Hastings!’ said Phœbe, gathering recollection and confidence. ‘I did not like to tell you yesterday, but I had a letter from poor Lucy Sandbrook. Some friends of that man, Mr. Hastings, have set it about that he is going to be married to me!’ and Phœbe laughed outright. ‘If Juliana has heard it, I don’t wonder that she is shocked, because you know Miss Charlecote said it would never do for me to associate with those gentlemen, and besides, Lucy says that he is a very bad man. I shall write to Juliana, and say that I have never had anything to do with him, and he is going away to-morrow, and Mervyn must be told not to have him back again. That will set it all straight at Acton Manor.’

Phœbe was quite herself again. She was too well

accustomed to gratuitous unkindness and reproaches from Juliana to be much hurt by them, and perceiving, as she thought, where the misconception lay, had no fears that it could not be cleared up. So when she had carefully written her letter to her sister, she dismissed the subject until she should be able to lay it before Miss Charlecote, dwelling more on Honor's pleasure on hearing of Lucy than on the more personal matter.

Miss Fennimore, looking over the letter, had deeper misgivings. It seemed to her rather to be a rebuke for the whole habit of life, than a warning against an individual, and she began to doubt whether even the seclusion of the west wing had been a sufficient protection in the eyes of the family from the contamination of such society as Mervyn received. Or was it a plot of Lady Acton's malevolence for hunting Phœbe away from her home? Miss Fennimore fell asleep, uneasy and perplexed, and in her dreams beheld Phœbe as the Lady in Comus, fixed in her chair, and resolute against a cup effervescing with carbonic acid gas, proffered by Jack Hastings, who thereupon gave it to Bertha, as she lay back in the dentist's chair, and both becoming transformed into pterodactyles, flew away while Miss Fennimore was vainly trying to summon the brothers by electric telegraph.

There was a whole bevy of letters for Phœbe the following morning, and first, a kind, sensible one from her guardian, much regretting to learn that Mr. Fulmort's guests were undesirable inmates for a house where young ladies resided, so that, though he had full confidence in Miss Fulmort's discretion, and understood that she had never associated with the persons in question, he thought her residence at home ought to be reconsidered, and should be happy to discuss the point on coming to Beauchamp, so soon as he should have recovered from an unfortunate fit of the gout, which at present detained him in town. Miss Fulmort might, however, be assured that her wishes should be his chief

consideration, and that he would take care not to separate her from Miss Maria.

That promise, and the absence of all mention of Lucilla's object of dread, gave Phœbe courage to open the missive from her eldest sister.

‘MY DEAR PHŒBE,

‘I always told you it would never answer, and you see I was right. If Mervyn will invite that horrid man, whatever you may do, no one will believe that you do not associate with him, and you may never get over it. I am telling everybody what children you are, quite in the schoolroom, but nothing will be of any use but your coming away at once, and appearing in society with me, so you had better send the children to Acton Manor, and come to me next week. If there are any teal in the decoy bring some, and ask Mervyn where he got that Barton's dry champagne,

‘Your affectionate sister,

‘AUGUSTA BANNERMAN.’

She had kept Robert's letter to the last, as refreshment after the rest.

‘St. Matthew's, Dec. 16th.

‘DEAR PHŒBE,

‘I am afraid this may not be your first intimation of what may vex and grieve you greatly, and what calls for much cool and anxious judgment. In you we have implicit confidence, and your adherence to Miss Charlecote's kind advice has spared you all imputation, though not, I fear, all pain. You may, perhaps, not know how disgraceful are the characters of some of the persons whom Mervyn has collected about him. I do him the justice to believe that he would shelter you from all intercourse with them as carefully as I should ; but I cannot forgive his having brought them beneath the same roof with you. I fear the fact has done harm in our own neighbourhood. People imagine

you to be associating with Mervyn's crew, and a monstrous report is abroad which has caused Bevil Acton to write to me and to Crabbe. We all agree that this is a betrayal of the confidence that you expressed in Mervyn, and that while he chooses to make his house a scene of dissipation, no seclusion can render it a fit residence for women or girls. I fear you will suffer much in learning this decision, for Mervyn's sake as well as your own. Poor fellow ! if he will bring evil spirits about him, good angels must depart. I would come myself, but that my presence would embitter Mervyn, and I could not meet him properly. I am writing to Miss Charlecote. If she should propose to receive you all at the Holt immediately, until Crabbe's most inopportune gout is over, you had better go thither at once. It would be the most complete vindication of your conduct that could be offered to the county, and would give time for considering of establishing you elsewhere, and still under Miss Fennimore's care. For Bertha's sake as well as your own, you must be prepared to leave home, and resign yourself to be passive in the decision of those bound to think for you, by which means *you* may avoid being included in Mervyn's anger. Do not distress yourself by the fear that any blame can attach to you or to Miss Fennimore ; I copy Bevil's expressions—"Assure Phœbe that though her generous confidence may have caused her difficulties, no one can entertain a doubt of her guileless intention and maidenly discretion. If it would not make further mischief, I would hasten to fetch her, but if she will do me the honour to accept her sister's invitation, I hope to do all in my power to make her happy and mark my esteem for her." These are his words ; but I suppose you will hardly prefer Acton Manor, though, should the Holt fail us, you might send the other two to the Manor, and come to Albury-street as Augusta wishes, when we could consult together on some means of keeping you united, and retaining Miss Fennimore, who must not be thrown

over, as it would be an injury to her prospects. Tell her from me that I look to her for getting you through this unpleasant business.

‘Your ever affectionate,
‘R. M. FULMORT.’

Phœbe never spoke, but handed each sheet as she finished it to her governess.

‘Promise me, Phœbe,’ said Miss Fennimore, as she came to Robert’s last sentence, ‘that none of these considerations shall bias you. Make no struggle for me, but use me as I may be most serviceable to you.’

Phœbe, instead of answering, kissed and clung to her.

‘What do you think of doing?’ asked the governess.

‘Nothing,’ said Phœbe.

‘You looked as if a thought had occurred to you.’

‘I only recollected the words, “your strength is to sit still,”’ said Phœbe, ‘and thought how well they agreed with Robert’s advice to be passive. Mr. Crabbe has promised not to separate us, and I will trust to that. Mervyn was very kind in letting us stay here, but he does not want us, and will not miss us,’—and with those words, quiet as they were, came a gush of irrepressible tears, just as a step resounded outside, the door was burst open, and Mervyn hurried in, purple with passion, and holding a bundle of letters crushed together in his hand.

‘I say,’ he hoarsely cried, ‘what’s all this? Who has been telling infamous tales of my house?’

‘We cannot tell—’ began Phœbe.

‘Do you know anything of this?’ he interrupted, fiercely turning on Miss Fennimore.

‘Nothing, sir. The letters which your sister has received have equally surprised and distressed me.’

‘Then they have set on you, Phœbe! The whole pack in full cry, as if it mattered to them whether I chose to have the Old Gentleman in the house, so long as he did not meddle with you!’

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Fulmort,’ interposed the governess, ‘the remonstrance is quite just. Had I been aware of the character of some of your late guests, I could not have wished your sisters to remain in the house with them.’

‘Are these your sentiments, Phœbe?’ he asked, sternly.

‘I am afraid they ought to be,’ she sadly answered.

‘Silly child ; so this pack of censorious women and parsons have frightened you into giving me up.’

‘Sisters do not give up brothers, Mervyn. You know how I thank you for having me here, but I could not amuse you, or make it pleasant to you, so there must be an end of it.’

‘So they hunt you out to be bullied by Juliana, or slaved to death by Augusta, which is it to be ? Or may be Robert has got his sisterhood cut and dried for you ; only mind, he shan’t make away with your £30,000 while I live to expose those popish tricks.’

‘For shame, Mervyn,’ cried Phœbe, all in a glow ; ‘I will not hear Robert so spoken of : he is always kind and good, and has taught me every right thing I know !’

‘Oh, very well ; and pray when does he summon you from among the ungodly ? Will the next train be soon enough ?’

‘Don’t, Mervyn ! Your friends go to-day, don’t they ? Mr. Crabbe does not desire any change to be made before he comes to see about it. May we not stay till that time, and spend our Christmas together ?’

‘You must ask Robert and Juliana, since you prefer them.’

‘No,’ said Phœbe, with spirit ; ‘it is right to attend to my elder sisters, and Robert has always helped and taught me, and I must trust his guidance, as I always have done. And I trust you too, Mervyn. You never thought you were doing us any harm. I may trust you still,’ she added, with so sweet and imploring a look that Mervyn gave an odd laugh, with some feeling in it.

‘Harm? Great harm I have done this creature, eh?’ he said, with his hand on her shoulder.

‘Few could do *her* harm, Mr. Fulmort,’ said the governess, ‘but report may have done some mischief.’

‘Who cares for report! I say, Phœbe, we will laugh at them all. You pluck up a spirit, stay with me, and we’ll entertain all the county, and then get some great swell to bring you out in town, and see what Juliana will say!’

‘I will stay with you while you are alone, and Mr. Crabbe lets me,’ said Phœbe.

‘Old fool of a fellow! Why couldn’t my father have made me your guardian, and then there would have been none of this row! One would think I had had her down to act barmaid to the fellows. And you never spoke to one, did you, Phœbe?’

‘Only now and then to Mr. Hastings. I could not help it after the day he came into the study when I was copying for you.’

‘Ah, well! that is nothing—nobody minds old Jack. I shall let them all know you were as safe as a Turk’s wife in a harem, and may be old Crabbe will hear reason if we get him down here alone, without a viper at each ear, as he had last time.’

With which words Mervyn departed, and Miss Fennimore exclaimed in some displeasure, ‘You can never think of remaining, Phœbe.’

‘I am afraid not,’ said Phœbe; ‘Mervyn does not seem to know what is proper for us, and I am too young to judge, so I suppose we must go. I wish I could make him happy with music, or books, or anything a woman could do! If you please, I think I must go over to the Holt. I cannot settle to anything just yet, and I shall answer my letters better when I have seen Miss Charlecote.’

In fact Phœbe felt herself going to her other guardian; but as she left the room, Bertha came hurriedly in from the garden, with a plaid thrown round her.

‘What—what—what’s the matter?’ she hastily asked, following Phœbe to her room. ‘Is there an end of all these mysteries?’

‘Yes,’ said Phœbe, ‘Miss Fennimore is ready for you.’

‘As if that were all I wanted to know. Do you think I did not hear Mervyn storming like a lion?’

‘I am sorry you did hear,’ said Phœbe, ‘for it was not pleasant. It seems that it is not thought proper for us to live here while Mervyn has so many gentleman-guests, so,’ with a sigh, ‘you will have your wish, Bertha. They mean us to go away!’

‘It is not my wish now,’ said Bertha, pulling pins in and out of Phœbe’s pincushion. ‘I am not the child I was in the summer. Don’t go, Phœbe; I know you can get your way, if you try for it.’

‘I must try to be put in the right way, Bertha, that is all I want.’

‘And you are going to the Holt for the most precise, narrow-minded way you can get. I wish I were in your place, Phœbe.’

Scarcely had Phœbe driven from the door, before she saw Miss Charlecote crossing the grass on foot, and after the interchange of a few words, it was agreed to talk while driving on towards Elverslope. Each was laden with the same subject, for not only had Honor heard from Robert, but during her visit to Moorcroft she had become enlightened on the gossip that seldom reached the Holt, and had learnt that the whole neighbourhood was scandalized at the Beauchamp doings, and was therefore shy of taking notice of the young people there. She had been incredulous at first, then extremely shocked and distressed, and though in part convinced that more than she guessed had passed beyond the west wing, she had come primed with a representation which she cautiously administered to Phœbe. The girl was more indignant on her brother’s account than alarmed on her own.

‘If that is the way the Raymonds talk of Mervyn,’

cried she, 'no wonder they made their niece cast him off, and drive him to despair.'

'It was no unkindness of the Raymonds, my dear. They were only sorry for you.'

'I do not want them to be sorry for me ; they ought to be sorry for Mervyn,' said Phœbe, almost petulantly.

'Perhaps they are,' said Honor. 'It was only in kindness that they spoke, and they had almost anticipated my explanation that you were kept entirely apart. Every gentleman hereabouts who has been at Beauchamp has declared such to be the case.'

'I should think so !' said Phœbe ; 'Mervyn knows how to take care of us better than that !'

'But all ladies do not seem willing to believe as much, shame on them,' said Honor ; 'and, tell me, Phœbe, have people called on you ?'

'Not many, but I have not called on them since they left their cards of inquiry. I had been thinking whether I ought.'

'We will consider. Perhaps I had better take you round some day, but I have been a very remiss protector, my poor child, if all be true that I am told of some of Mervyn's friends. It was an insult to have them under the same roof with you.'

'Will you look at this letter ?' said Phœbe. 'It is very kind—it is from Lucy.'

Those plain words alone occurred to Phœbe as a preparation for a letter that was sure to move Miss Charlecote greatly, if only by the slight of not having written to her, the most obvious person. But the flighty generosity, and deep though inconsistent feeling were precious, and the proud relenting of the message at the end touched Honor with hope. They laughed at the report that had elicited Lucilla's letter, but the reserve of the warning about Mr. Hastings, coming from the once unscrupulous girl, startled Honor even more than what she had heard at Moorcroft. Was the letter to be answered ? Yes, by all means,

cried Honor, catching at any link of communication. She could discover Lucilla's address, and was sure that even brief thanks and explanations from Phœbe would be good for Lucy.

Like Miss Fennimore, Honor was surprised by Phœbe's composure under her share of the evil report. The strictures which would have been dreadful to an older person seemed to fly over her innocent head, their force either uncomprehended or unfelt. She yielded implicitly to the propriety of the change, but her grief was at the family quarrel, the leaving home, and the unmerited degree of blame cast on Mervyn, not the aspersions on herself; although, as Honor became vexed at her calmness, she withheld none of them in the desire to convince her of the expediency of leaving Beauchamp at once for the Holt. No, even though this was Robert's wish, Phœbe could still not see the necessity, as long as Mervyn should be alone. If he should bring any of his discreditable friends, she promised at once to come to Miss Charlecote, but otherwise she could perceive no reason for grieving him, and astonishing the world, by implying that his sisters could not stay in his house. She thought him unwell, too, and wished to watch him, and, on the whole, did not regret her guardian's gout, which would give her a little more time at home, and put off the discussion till there should be less anger.

Is this weak? is it childish indifference? thought Honor, or is it a spirit superior to the selfish personal dread that would proclaim its own injured innocence by a vehement commotion?

Phœbe rejoiced that she had secured her interview with her friend, for when the guests were gone, Mervyn claimed her whole attention, and was vexed if she were not continually at his beck. After their *tête-à-tête* dinner, he kept her sitting over the dessert while he drank his wine. She tried this opportunity of calling his attention to the frauds of the servants, but he merely laughed his mocking laugh at her sim-

plicity in supposing that everybody's servants did not cheat.

'Miss Charlecote's don't.'

'Don't they! Ha—ha! Why, she's the very mark for imposition, and hypocrisy into the bargain.'

Phœbe did not believe it, but would not argue the point, returning to that nearer home. 'Nonsense, Phœbe,' he said; 'it's only a choice who shall prey upon one, and if I have a set that will do it with a civil countenance, and let me live out of the spoil, I'll not be bothered.'

'I cannot think it need go on so.'

'Well, it wont; I shall break up the concern, and let the house, or something.'

'Let the house? Oh, Mervyn! I thought you meant to be a county man.'

'Let those look to that who have hindered me,' said Mervyn, fiercely swallowing one glassful, and pouring out another.

'Should you live in London?'

'At Jericho, for aught I care, or any one else.'

Her attempt to controvert this remark brought on a tirade against the whole family, which she would not keep up by reply, and which ended in moody silence. Again she tried to rise, but he asked why she could not stay with him five minutes, and went on absently pouring out wine and drinking it, till, as the clock struck nine, the bottom of the decanter was reached, when he let her lead the way to the drawing-room, and there, taking up the paper, soon fell asleep, then awoke at ten at the sound of her moving to go to bed, and kept her playing piquet for an hour and a half.

An evening or two of this kind convinced Phœbe that even with Mervyn alone it was not a desirable life. She was less shocked than a girl used to a higher standard at home might have been, but that daily bottle and perpetual cards weighed on her imagination, and she felt that her younger sisters ought not to grow

up to such a spectacle. Still her loving heart yearned over Mervyn, who was very fond of her, and consulted her pleasure continually in his own peculiar and selfish way, although often exceedingly cross to her as well as to every one else ; but this ill-temper was so visibly the effect of low spirits that she easily endured and forgave it. She saw that he was both unwell and unhappy. She could not think what would become of him when the present arrangement should be broken up ; but could only cling to him, as long as she could pity him. It was no wonder that on the Sunday, Honora seeing her enter the church, could not help being reminded of the expression of that child-saint of Raffaëlle, wandering alone through the dragon-haunted wood, wistful and distressed, yet so confident in the Unseen Guide and Guardian that she treads down evils and perils in innocence, unconscious of her full danger and of their full blackness.



CHAPTER VII.

Close within us we will carry, strong, collected, calm, and brave,
The true panoply of quiet which the bad world never gave ;
Very serpents in discretion, yet as guileless as the dove,
Lo! obedience is the watchword, and the countersign is love.
W. G. TUPPER.

ON the next hunting day, Mervyn took Phoebe with him to the meet, upon a favourite common towards Elverslope, where on a fine morning ladies were as apt to be found as hounds and huntsmen, so that she would be at no loss for companions when he left her.

Phoebe rode, as she did everything else, well, quietly and firmly, and she looked very young and fresh, with her rounded rosy cheeks and chin. Her fair hair was parted back under a round hat, her slenderly plump figure appeared to advantage mounted on her bright bay, and altogether she presented a striking contrast to her brother. She had not seen him in hunting costume for nearly a year, and she observed with pain how much he had lost his good looks ; his well-made youthful air was passing away, and his features were becoming redder and coarser ; but he was in his best humour, good-natured, and as nearly gay as he ever was ; and Phoebe enjoyed her four-miles' ride in the beauty of a warm December's day, the sun shining on dewy hedges, and robins and thrushes trying to treat the weather like spring, as they sang amid the rich

stores of coral fruit that hung as yet untouched on every hawthorn or eglantine.

The ladies mustered strong on the smooth turf of the chalk down bordering the copse which was being drawn. Phœbe looked out for acquaintance, but a few gentlemen coming up to greet her, she did not notice, as Mervyn did, that the girls with whom he had wished to leave her had become intent on some doings in the copse, and had trotted off with their father. He made his way to the barouche where sat the *grande dame* of the county, exchanged civilities, and asked leave to introduce his sister. Phœbe, who had never seen the lady before, thought nothing of the cold distant bow ; it was for Mervyn, who knew what her greetings could be, to fume and rage inwardly. Other acknowledgments passed, but no party had approached or admitted Phœbe, and when the hounds went away, she was still riding alone with her brother and a young officer. She bade them not to mind her, she would ride home with the servant, and as all were in motion, she had enough to do to hold in her horse, while Mervyn and his friend dashed forward, and soon she found herself alone, except for the groom ; the field were well away over the down, the carriages driving off, the mounted maidens following the chase as far as the way was fair and ladylike.

Phœbe had no mind to do so. Her isolation made her feel forlorn, and brought home Miss Charlecote's words as to the opinion entertained of her by the world. Poor child, something like a tear came into her eye and a blush to her cheek, but 'never mind,' she thought, 'they will believe Miss Charlecote, and she will take care of me. If only Mervyn will not get angry, and make an uproar ! I shall soon be gone away ! When shall I come back ?'

She rode up to the highest part of the down for a take-leave gaze. There lay Elverslope in its bason-like valley scooped out in the hills, with the purple bloom of autumnal haze veiling its red brick and slate ;

there, on the other side, the copses and arable fields dipped and rose, and rose and dipped again, till the undulations culminated in the tall fir-trees in the Holt garden, the landmark of the country; and on the bare slope to the west, Beauchamp's pillars and pediment made a stately speck in the landscape. 'Home no longer!' thought Phœbe; 'there will be strangers there—and we shall be on the world! Oh! why cannot Mervyn be like Robert! How happy we could be!'

Beauchamp had not been a perfect Eden in itself, but still it had all the associations of the paradise of her guileless childhood; and to her the halo around it would always have the radiance of the loving spirit through which she viewed it. The undefined future was hard to bear, but she thought of Robert, and of the promise that neither her sisters nor Miss Fennimore should be parted from her, and tried to rest thankful on that comfort.

She had left the down for the turnpike-road, the sounds of the hunt often reaching her, with glimpses of men and dogs in the distance taking a direction parallel with her own. Presently a red coat glanced through the hedge of one of the cross lanes, as if coming towards the road, and as she reached the opening at the end, a signal was made to her to stop. Foreboding some accident, she hastily turned up the narrow white muddy lane, and was met by an elderly gentleman.

'Don't be alarmed,' he said, kindly; 'only your brother seems rather unwell, and I thought I had best see him under your charge.'

Mervyn was by this time in sight, advancing slowly, and Phœbe with rapid thanks rode on to meet him. She knew that dull, confused, dazzled eye belonged to his giddy fits, and did not wonder at the half-uttered murmur, rather in the imprecation line, with which he spoke, but the reel in his saddle terrified her greatly, and she was dismayed to see that the gentleman had proceeded into the high road instead of offering further assistance. She presently perceived that

the danger of falling was less real than apparent, and that her brother could still keep his seat, and govern his horse, though nearly unable to look or speak. She kept close to him, and was much relieved to find that the stranger had not returned to the sport, but was leisurely following at some distance behind the groom. Never had two miles seemed so long as under her frequent alarms lest Mervyn should become unable to keep the saddle ; but at each moment of terror, she heard the pace of the hunter behind quickened to come to her help, and if she looked round she met an encouraging sign.

When the lodge was reached, and Mervyn, somewhat revived, had ridden through the gates, she turned back to give her warm thanks. A kind, fatherly, friendly face looked at her with a sort of compassion, as putting aside her thanks, the gentleman said, quickly, yet half-reluctantly, 'Have you ever seen him like this before ?'

'Yes ; the giddiness often comes on in the morning, but never so badly as this. I think it was from the rapid motion.'

'Has he had advice ?'

'I cannot persuade him to see any one. Do you think he ought ? I would send at once, at the risk of his being angry.'

'Does Dr. Martyn attend you ? Shall I leave a message as I go home ?'

'I should be most thankful !'

'It may be nothing, but you will be happier that it should be ascertained ;' and with another kindly nod, he rode off.

Mervyn had gone to his room, and answered her inquiries at the door with a brief, blunt 'better,' to be interpreted that he did not wish to be disturbed. She did not see him till dinner-time, when he had a sullen headache, and was gruff and gloomy. She tried to learn who the friend in need had been, but he had been incapable of distinguishing anybody or anything at the

moment of the attack, and was annoyed at having been followed. 'What a pottering ass to come away from a run on a fool's errand!' he said; 'Some Elverslope spy, who will set it about the country that I had been drinking, and cast that up to you!' and then he began to rail against the ladies, singly and collectively, inconsistently declaring it was Phœbe's own fault for not having called on them, and that he would have Augusta to Beauchamp, give a ball and supper, and show whether Miss Fulmort were a person to be cut.

This mode of vindication not being to Miss Fulmort's taste, she tried to avert it by doubts whether Augusta could be had; and was told that, show Lady Bannerman a bottle of Barton's dry champagne, and she would come to the world's end. Meantime, Phœbe must come out to-morrow for a round of visits, whereat her heart failed her, as a thrusting of herself where she was not welcome; but he spoke so fiercely and dictatorially, that she reserved her pleading for the morning, when he would probably be too inert not to be glad of the escape.

At last, Dr. Martyn's presence in the drawing-room was announced to her. She began her explanation with desperate bravery; and though the first words were met with a scoffing grunt, she found Mervyn less displeased than she had feared—nay, almost glad that the step had been taken, though he would not say so, and made a great favour of letting her send the physician to him in the dining-room.

After a time, Dr. Martyn came to tell her that he had found her brother's head and pulse in such a state as to need instant relief by cupping; and that the young Union doctor had been sent for from the village for the purpose. A constitutional fulness of blood in the head had been aggravated by his mode of life, and immediate discipline, severe regimen, and abstinence from business or excitement were the only means of averting dangerous illness; in fact, his condition might at any time become exceedingly critical, though per-

severance in care might possibly prevent all absolute peril. He himself was thoroughly frightened. His own sensations and forebodings seconded the sentence too completely for resistance ; it was almost a relief to give way ; and his own method of driving away discomfort had so signally failed, that he was willing to resign himself to others.

Phœbe assisted at the cupping valorously and handily. She had a civil speech from young Mr. Jackson, and Mervyn, as she bade him good night, said, ‘I can’t spare you now, Phœbe.’

‘Not till you are better,’ she answered.

And so she told Miss Charlecote, and wrote to Robert ; but neither was satisfied. Honora said it was unlucky. It might certainly be a duty to nurse Mervyn if he were really ill, and if he made himself fit company for her, but it would not set her straight with the neighbourhood ; and Robert wrote in visible displeasure at this complication of the difficulty. ‘If Mervyn’s habits had disordered his health, it did not render his pursuits more desirable for his sisters. If he wanted Phœbe’s attendance, let him come to town with her to the Bannermans ; but his ailments must not be made an excuse for detaining her in so unsuitable a position as that into which he had brought her.’

It was not so kind a letter as Phœbe would have claimed from Robert, and it was the more trying as Mervyn, deprived of the factitious exhilaration that had kept him up, and lowered by treatment, was dispirited, depressed, incapable of being entertained, cross at her failures, yet exacting of her attendance. He had business at his office in the City that needed his presence, so he insisted till the last morning upon going, and then owned himself in no state to go farther than the study, where he tried to write, but found his brain so weak and confused that he could hardly complete a letter, and was obliged to push over even the simplest calculation to Phœbe. In vain she tried to divert his mind from this perilous exertion ; he had not taste nor

cultivation enough to be interested in anything she could devise, and harping upon some one of the unpleasant topics that occupied his thoughts was his only entertainment when he grew tired of cards or backgammon.

Phoebe sat up late writing to Robert a more minute account of Mervyn's illness, which she thought must plead for him ; and rather sad at heart, she had gone to bed and fallen asleep, when far on in the night a noise startled her. She did not suspect her own imagination of being to blame, except so far as the associations with illness in the house might have recalled the sounds that once had been wont to summon her to her mother's room. The fear that her brother might be worse made her listen, till the sounds became matters of certainty. Springing to the window, her eyes seemed to stiffen with amaze as she beheld in the clear, full moonlight, on the frosty sward, the distinctly-traced shadow of a horse and cart. The objects themselves were concealed by a clump of young trees, but their forms were distinctly pictured on the turf, and the conviction flashed over her that a robbery must be going forward.

'Perils and dangers of this night, indeed!' One prayer, one thought. She remembered the great house-bell, above the attic stairs in the opposite wing, at the other end of the gallery, which led from the top of the grand staircase, where the chief bedroom doors opened, and a jet of gas burnt all night on the balustrade. Throwing on her dressing-gown, she sped along the passage, and pushing open the swing door, beheld Mervyn at the door of his own room, and at the head of the stairs a man, in whom she recognised the discarded footman, raising a pistol. One swift bound—her hand was on the gas-pipe. All was darkness, save a dim stripe from within the open door of her mother's former dressing-room, close to where she stood. She seized the lock, drew it close, and had turned the key before the hand

within had time to wrench round the inner handle. That same instant, the flash and report of a pistol made her cry out her brother's name.

'Hollo! what did you put out the light for?' he angrily answered; and as she could just distinguish his white shirt sleeves, she sprang to him. Steps went hurriedly down the stairs. 'Gone!' they both cried at once; Mervyn, with an imprecation on the darkness, adding, 'Go and ring the bell. I'll watch here.'

She obeyed, but the alarm had been given, and the house was astir. Candle-light gleamed above—cries, steps, and exclamations were heard, and she was obliged to hurry down, to save herself from being run over. Two figures had joined Mervyn, the voice of one proclaiming her as Bertha, quivering with excitement. 'In there? My emeralds are in there! Open the door, or he will make off with my—my emeralds!'

'Safe, my child? Don't stand before that door,' cried Miss Fennimore, pulling Phoebe back with a fond, eager grasp.

'Here, some of you,' shouted Mervyn to the men, whose heads appeared behind the herd of maids, 'come and lay hold of the fellow when I unlock the door.'

The women fell back with suppressed screams, and readily made way for the men, but they shuffled, backed, and talked of pistols, and the butler suggested the policeman.

'The policeman—he lives two miles off,' cried Bertha. 'He'll go out of window with my emeralds! Unlock the door, Mervyn.'

'Unlock it yourself,' said Mervyn, with an impatient stamp of his foot. 'Pshaw! but thank you,' as Miss Fennimore put into his hand his double-barrelled gun, the first weapon she had found—unloaded, indeed, but even as a club formidable enough to give him confidence to unlock the door, and call to the man to give himself up. The servants huddled together like sheep, but there was no answer. He called for a light. It

was put into his hand by Phœbe, and as he opened the door, was blown out by a stream of cold air from the open window.

The thief was gone. Everybody was ready to press in and look for him in every impossible place, but he had evidently escaped by the leads of the portico beneath, not, however, with 'my emeralds'—he had only attempted the lock of the jewel cabinet.

Phœbe hurried to see whether Maria had been frightened, and finding her happily asleep, followed the rest of the world downstairs, where the servants seemed to be vying with each other in the magnitude of the losses they announced, while Mervyn was shouting himself hoarse with passionate orders that everything should be left alone—doors, windows, plate-chests, and all—for the inspection of the police; and human nature could not resist lifting up and displaying signs of the robbery every moment, in the midst of the storm of vituperation thus excited.

Mervyn could hardly attend to Phœbe's mention of the cart, but as soon as it reached his senses, he redoubled his hot commands to keepers and stablemen to set off in pursuit, and called for his horse to ride to Elverslope, to give information at the police station and telegraph office. Phœbe implored him to rest and send a messenger, but he roughly bade her not be so absurd, commanded again that nothing should be disturbed, or, if she *would* be busy, that she should make out a list of all that was missing.

'Grateful!' indignantly thought Miss Fennimore, as Phœbe was left leaning on a pillar in the portico, watching him ride away, the pale light of the yellow setting moon giving an almost ghostly appearance to her white drapery and wistful attitude. Putting an arm round her, the governess found her shivering from head to foot, and pale and cold as marble; her knees knocked together when she walked, and her teeth chattered as she strove to smile, but her quietness still showed itself in all her movements, as she returned

into the hall, and reached the welcome support of a chair beside the rekindled fire.

Miss Fennimore chafed her hands, and she looked up, smiled, and said, 'Thank you.'

'Then you were frightened, after all, Phœbe,' cried Bertha, triumphantly.

'Was I?—I don't know,' said Phœbe, as in a dream.

'What, when you don't know what you are talking of, and are still trembling all over?'

'I can't tell. I think what came on me then was thankfulness.'

'I am sure we may be thankful that our jewels are the only things safe!'

'Oh! Bertha, you don't know, then, that the man was taking aim at Mervyn!' and the shudder returned.

'There, Phœbe, for the sake of candour and psychology, confess your terror.'

'Indeed, Bertha,' said Phœbe, with a smile on her tremulous lip, 'it is very odd, but I don't think I was afraid; there was a feeling of shadowing Wings that left no room for terror.'

'That enabled you to think and act?' asked Miss Fennimore.

'I didn't think; it came to me,' said Phœbe. 'Pray let me go; Bertha dear, you had better go to bed. Pray lie down, Miss Fennimore.'

She moved slowly away, her steps still unsteady and her cheeks colourless, but the sweet light of thankfulness on her face; while Bertha said, in her moralizing tone, 'It is a curious study to see Phœbe taking her own steady nerves and power of resource for something external to herself, and being pious about it.'

Miss Fennimore was not gratified by her apt pupil's remark. 'If Phœbe's conduct do not fill you with reverence, both for her and that which actuates her, I can only stand astonished,' she said.

Bertha turned away, and erected her eyebrows.

No one could go to bed, and before five o'clock Phœbe came down, dressed for the day, and set to

work with the butler and the inventory of the plate to draw up an account of the losses. Not merely the plate in common use was gone, but the costly services and ornaments that had been the glory of old Mr. Fulmort's heart ; and the locks had not been broken but opened with a key ; the drawing-rooms had been rifled of their expensive bijouterie, and the foray would have been completely successful had it included the jewels. There were no marks of a violent entrance ; windows and doors were all fastened as usual, with the single exception of the back door, which was found ajar, but with no traces of having been opened in an unusual manner, though the heavy bolts and bars would have precluded an entrance from the outside even with a false key.

Early in the day, Mervyn returned with the superintendent of police. He was still too much excited to rest, and his heavy tread re-echoed from floor to floor, as he showed the superintendent round the house, calling his sister or the servants to corroborate his statements, or help out his account of what he had hardly seen or comprehended. Thus he came to Phœbe for her version of the affair in the gallery, of which he only knew his own share—the noise that had roused him, the sight of the burglar, the sudden darkness, the report of the pistol ; and the witness of his danger—the bullet—was in the wall nearly where his head had been. When Phœbe had answered his questions, he gazed at her, and exclaimed—‘Hollo ! why, Phœbe, it seems that but for you, Parson Robert would be in possession here !’ and burst into a strange, nervous laugh, ending by coming to her, and giving a hearty kiss to her forehead, ere hurrying away to report her evidence to the policeman.

When all measures had been taken, intelligence sent back to the station, and a search instituted in every direction, Mervyn consented to sit down to breakfast, but talked instead of eating, telling Phœbe that even without her recognition of James Smithson, the former

footman, the superintendent would have attributed the burglary to a person familiar with the house, provided with facsimiles of all the keys, except those of the jewels, as well as sufficiently aware of the habits of the family to make the attempt just before the jewels were to be removed, and when the master was likely to be absent. The appearance of the back-door had led to the conclusion that the thieves had been admitted from within; a London detective had therefore been sent for, who was to come in the guise of a clerk from the distillery, bringing down the books to Mr. Fulmort, and Phœbe was forbidden to reveal his true character to any one but Miss Fennimore. So virulently did Mervyn talk of Smithson, that Phœbe was sorry she had recognised him, and became first compassionate, then disconcerted and shocked. She rose to leave the room as the only means of silencing him; he got up to come after her, abusing the law because house-breaking was not a hanging matter, his face growing more purple with passion every moment; but his steps suddenly failed, his exclamation transferred his fury to his own giddiness, and Phœbe, flying to his side, was only just in time to support him to a couch. It was the worst attack he had yet had, and his doctors coming in the midst of it, used prompt measures to relieve him, and impressed on both him and his sister that everything would depend on perfect quiet and absence from all disturbance; and he was so much exhausted by the reaction of his excitement, loss of blood, and confusion of head, that he attempted little but long fretful sighs when at length he was left to her. After much weariness and discomfort he fell asleep, and Phœbe ventured to creep quietly out of the library to see Miss Charlecote, who was hearing the night's adventures in the schoolroom. Scarcely, however, had Honor had time to embrace the little heroine, whose conduct had lost nothing in Miss Fennimore's narration, when a message came from Elverslope. It was the day of the petty sessions, and a notable bad

character having been taken up with some suspicious articles upon him, the magistrates were waiting for Mr. Fulmort to make out the committal on his evidence.

‘I must go instead,’ said Phœbe, after considering for a moment.

‘My dear,’ exclaimed Honor, ‘you do not know how unpleasant it will be!’

‘Mervyn must sleep,’ said Phœbe; ‘and if this be an innocent man, he ought to be cleared at once. If it be not improper, I think I ought to go. May I?’ looking at the governess, who suggested her speaking to the superintendent, and learning whether her brother had been absolutely summoned.

It proved to be only a verbal message, and the superintendent urged her going, telling her that her evidence would suffice for the present, and that she would be the most important witness at the assizes—which he evidently considered as a great compliment.

Miss Charlecote undertook to go and take care of her young friend, and they set off in silence, Phœbe leaning back with her veil down, and Honor, perceiving that she needed this interval of quiet repose, watching her with wonder. Had it been Honor’s own case, she would have hung back out of dislike to pursuing an enemy, and from dread of publicity, but these objections had apparently not occurred to the more simple mind, only devising how to spare her brother; and while Honor would have been wretched from distrust of her own accuracy, and her habits of imperfect observation would have made her doubt her own senses and memory, she honoured Phœbe’s careful training in seeing what she saw, and hearing what she heard, without cross lights or counter sounds from imagination. Once Phœbe inquired in a low, awe-struck voice, ‘Shall I be put on oath?’

‘Most likely, my dear.’

Phœbe’s hands were pressed together as though in preparation for a religious rite. She was not dismayed,

but from her strict truth at all times, she was the more sensible of the sacredness and solemnity of the great appeal.

An offence on so large a scale had brought a throng of loiterers to the door of the town-hall, and Honor felt nervous and out of place as way was made for the two ladies to mount the stairs to the justice-room; but there she was welcomed by several of the magistrates, and could watch Phoebe's demeanour, and the impression it made on persons accustomed to connect many strange stories with the name of Miss Fulmort. That air of maidenly innocence, the girlish form in deep mourning, the gentle seriousness and grave composure of the young face, the simple, self-possessed manner, and the steady, distinct tones of the clear, soft voice were, as Honor felt, producing an effect that was shown in the mode of addressing her, always considerate and courteous, but increasing in respect and confidence.

And as Phoebe raised her eyes, the chairman's face—the first to meet her glance—was the kind ruddy one, set in iron grey hair, that she remembered as belonging to the hunter who had sacrificed the run to see Mervyn safely home. The mutual recognition, and the tone of concern for his illness, made her feel in the presence of a friend, and she was the more at ease in performing her part.

To her great relief, the man in custody was unknown to her. James Smithson, she said, was taller, and had a longer face, and she had not seen him whom she had locked into the dressing-room. However, she identified a gold and turquoise letter-weight; and the setting of a seal, whence the stone with the crest had been extracted, both of which had been found in the man's pocket, together with some pawnbroker's tickets, which represented a buhl-clock and other articles from Beauchamp. She was made to give an account of the robbery. Honor had never felt prouder of any of her favourites than of her, while listening to the modest, simple, but clear and circum-

stantial recital, and watching how much struck the country gentlemen were by the girl who had been of late everywhere pitied or censured.

The statement over, she was desired to answer a few questions from Captain Morden, the chief of the constabulary force, who had come from the county town to investigate the affair. Taking her aside, he minutely examined her on the appearance of some of the articles mentioned in the inventory, on the form of the shadow of the horse and cart, on the thieves themselves, and chiefly on Smithson, and how she could be so secure of the identity of the robber in the pea-jacket with the footman in powder and livery.

‘I can hardly tell,’ said Phœbe, ‘but I have no doubt in my own mind.’

‘Was he like this?’ asked Captain Morden, showing her a photograph.

‘Certainly not.’

‘Nor this?’

‘No.’

‘Nor this?’

‘Yes, that is Smithson in plain clothes.’

‘Right, Miss Fulmort. You have an eye for a likeness. These fellows have such a turn for having their portraits done, that in these affairs we always try if the shilling photographers have duplicates. This will be sent to town by the next train.’

‘I am not sure that I should have known it if I had not seen it before.’

‘Indeed! Should you object to tell me under what circumstances?’

‘At the photographer’s, at the time he was at Hiltonbury,’ said Phœbe. ‘I went to him with one of my sisters, and we were amused by finding many of the likenesses of our servants. Smithson and another came in to be taken while we were there, and we afterwards saw this portrait when calling for my sister’s.’

‘Another—another servant?’ said the keen captain.

‘Yes, one of the maids.’

‘Her name, if you please.’

‘Indeed,’ said Phœbe, distressed, as she saw this jotted down. ‘I cannot bring suspicion and trouble on any one.’

‘You will do no such thing, Miss Fulmort. We will only keep our eye on her. Neither she, nor any one else, shall have any ground for supposing her under suspicion, but it is our duty to miss no possible indication. Will you oblige me with her name.’

‘She is called Jane, but I do not know her real name,’ said Phœbe, with much reluctance, and in little need of the injunction to secrecy on this head. The general eagerness to hunt down the criminals saddened her, and she was glad to be released, with thanks for her distinct evidence. The kind old chairman then met her, quite with an air of fatherly protection, such as elderly men often wear towards orphaned maidens, and inquired more particularly for her brother’s health. She was glad to thank him again for having sent the physician, when his aid was so needful, and she was in so much difficulty. ‘A bold stroke,’ he said, smiling; ‘I thought you might throw all the blame on me if it were needless.’

‘Needless—oh! it may have saved him. Is that the carriage? I must get home as soon as I can.’

‘Yes, I am sure you must be anxious, but I hope to see more of you another time. Lady Raymond must come and see if you cannot find a day to spend with my girls.’

Lady Raymond! So this was Sir John! Mervyn’s foe and maligner! Was he repenting at the sight of what he had done? Yet he really looked like a very good, kind old man, and seemed satisfied with the very shabby answer he obtained to a speech that filled Honor with a sense of her young friend’s victory. There was Phœbe, re-established in the good graces of the neighbourhood, favoured by the very *élite* of the county for goodness, sought by those who had

never visited at Beauchamp in the days of its gaiety and ostentation ! Ungrateful child, not to be better pleased—only saying that she supposed she should go away when her brother should be well again, and not seeing her way to any day for Moorcroft ! Was she still unforgiving for Mervyn's rejection, or had she a feeling against visiting those who had not taken notice of her family before ?

Mervyn met Phoebe in the hall, still looking very ill, with his purple paleness, his heavy eyes, and uncertain steps, and though he called himself all right since his sleep, it was with a weary gasp that he sank into his chair, and called on her for an account of what she had done. His excitement seemed to have burnt itself out, for he listened languidly, and asked questions by jerks, dozing half way through the answer, and wakening to some fresh inquiry ; once it was—‘ And did the old sinner take any notice of you ?’

‘ The prisoner ?’

‘ Nonsense. Old Raymond. Of course he was in the chair.’

‘ He was very kind. It was he who came home from the hunt with us the other day.’

‘ Ha ! I said it was some old woman of a spy, wanting to get up a story against me !’

‘ Nay, I think he felt kindly, for he talked of Lady Raymond calling, and my spending a day at Moorcroft.’

‘ Oh ! so the godly mean to rescue you, do they ?’

‘ I did not accept. Perhaps they will never think of it again.’

‘ No ; his ladies will not let him !’ sneered Mervyn.

Nevertheless, his last words that night were, ‘ So the Raymonds have asked you !’

He was in a more satisfactory state the next day ; feeble, but tamed into endurance of medical treatment, and almost indifferent about the robbery ; as though his passion were spent, and he were tired of the subject. However, the police were alert. The man whom they had taken up was a squatter in the forest,

notorious as a poacher and thief, and his horse and cart answered to Phœbe's description of the shadow. He had been arrested when returning with them from the small sea-port on the other side of the forest in the next county, and on communicating with the authorities there, search at a dealer's in marine stores had revealed hampers filled with the Beauchamp plate, as yet unmelted. The spoils of lesser bulk had disappeared with Smithson and the other criminal.



CHAPTER VIII.

Mascarille.—Oh ! oh ! je ne prenois pas garde ;
Tandis que sans songer à mal, je vous regarde
Votre œil en tapinois me dérobe mon cœur,
Au voleur ! au voleur ! au voleur ! au voleur !

Cathos.—Ah ! voilà qui est poussé dans le dernier galant !

Les Precieuses Ridicules.



HE detective arrived, looking so entirely the office clerk as to take in Mervyn himself at first sight ; and the rest of the world understood that he was to stay till their master could go over the accounts with him. As housekeeper's room company, his attentions were doubly relished by the housemaids, and jealousy was not long in prompting the revelation that Jane Hart had been Smithson's sweetheart, and was supposed to have met him since her dismissal. Following up this trail, the detective proved to his own satisfaction that she had been at a ball at a public-house in the next village the night before the hunt, and had there met both Smithson and the poacher. This, however, he reserved for Mervyn's private ear, still watching his victim, in the hope that she might unconsciously give some clue to the whereabouts of her lover. The espionage diverted Mervyn, and gave him the occupation for his thoughts that he sorely needed ; but it oppressed Phœbe, and she shrank from the sight of the housemaid, as though she herself were dealing treacherously by her.

‘Phœbe,’ said Mervyn, mysteriously, coming into the library, where his tardy breakfast was spread,

‘that villain Smithson has been taken up at Liverpool; and here’s a letter for you to look at. Fenton has captured a letter to that woman Hart, who, he found, was always wanting to go to the post—but he can’t make it out; and I thought it was German, so I brought it to you. It looks as if old Lieschen—’

‘No! no! it can’t be,’ cried Phœbe. ‘I’ll clear it up in a moment.’

But as she glanced at the letter the colour fled from her cheek.

‘Well, what is it?’ said Mervyn, impatiently.

‘Oh, Mervyn!’ and she put her hands before her face.

‘Come, the fewer words the better. Out with it at once.’

‘Mervyn! It is to Bertha!’ She stood transfixed.

‘What?’ cried Mervyn.

‘To Bertha,’ repeated Phœbe, looking as if she could never shut her eyes.

‘Bertha? What, a billet-doux; the little precocious pussy-cat!’ and he laughed, to Phœbe’s increased horror.

‘If it could only be a mistake!’ said she; ‘but here is her name! It is not German, only English in German writing. Oh, Bertha! Bertha!’

‘Well, but who is the fellow? Let me look,’ said Mervyn.

‘It is too foolish,’ said Phœbe, guarding it, in the midst of her cold chills of dismay. ‘There is no surname—only John. Ah! here’s J. H. Oh! Mervyn, could it be Mr. Hastings?’

‘No such thing! John! Why, my name’s John—everybody’s name is John! That’s nothing.’

‘But, Mervyn, I was warned,’ said Phœbe, her eyes again dilating with dismay, ‘that Mr. Hastings never was received into a house with women without there being cause to repent it.’

‘Experience might have taught you how much slanderous gossip to believe by this time! I believe

it is some trumpery curate she has been meeting at Miss Charlecote's school feasts.'

'For shame, Mervyn,' cried Phœbe, in real anger.

'Curates like thirty thousand as much as other men,' said Mervyn, sulkily.

'After all,' said Phœbe, controlling herself, 'what signifies most is, that poor Bertha should have been led to do such a dreadful thing.'

'If ever I take charge of a pack of women again ! But let's hear what the rascal says to her.'

'I do not think it is fair to read it all,' said Phœbe, glancing over the tender passages. 'Poor child, how ashamed she will be ! But listen—' and she read a portion, as if meant to restrain the girl's impatience, promising to offer a visit to Beauchamp, or, if that were refused till the captives were carried off, assuring her there would be ways and means at Acton Manor, where a little coldness from the baronet always secured the lady's good graces.

Acton Manor was in Mr. Hastings' neighbourhood, and Mervyn struck his own knee several times.

'Hum ! ha ! Was not some chaff going on one day about the heiresses boxed up in the west wing ? Some one set you all down at a monstrous figure—a hundred thousand a-piece. I wonder if he were green enough to believe it ! Hastings ! No, it can't be ! Here, we'll have the impudent child down, and frighten it out of her. But first, how are we to put off that fellow Fenton ? Make up something to tell him.'

'Making up would be of no use,' said Phœbe ; 'he is too clever. Tell him it is a family matter.'

Mervyn left the room, and Phœbe hid her face in her hands, thunderstruck, and endeavouring to disentangle her thoughts, perturbed between shame, indignation, and the longing to shield and protect her sister. She had not fully realized her sister's offence, so new to her imagination, when she was roused by Mervyn's return, saying that he had sent for Bertha to have it over.

Starting up, she begged to go and prepare her sister, but he peremptorily detained her, and, 'Oh, be kind to her,' was all that she could say, before in tripped Bertha, looking restless and amazed, but her *retroussé* nose, round features, and wavy hair so childish that the accusation seemed absurd.

So Mervyn felt it, and in vain drew in his feet, made himself upright, and tried to look magisterial. 'Bertha,' he began, 'Bertha, I have sent for you, Bertha—it is not possible—What's that?' pointing to the letter, as though it had been a stain of ink which she had just perpetrated.

Alarmed perhaps, but certainly not confounded, Bertha put her hands before her, and demurely said—'What do you mean?'

'What do you mean, Bertha, by such a correspondence as this?'

'If you know that letter is for me, why did you meddle with it?' she coolly answered.

'Upon my word, this is assurance,' cried Mervyn.

'Give me my letter,' repeated Bertha, reaching out for it. 'No one else has a right to touch it.'

'If there be nothing amiss,' said Phœbe, coming to the relief of her brother, who was almost speechless at this audacity, 'why receive it under cover to a servant?'

'Because prejudice surrounds me,' stoutly replied Bertha, with barely a hitch in her speech, as if making a grand stroke; but seeing her brother smile, she added in an annihilating tone, 'practical tyranny is exercised in every family until education and intellect effect a moral emancipation.'

'What?' said Mervyn, 'education teaching you to write letters in German hand! Fine results! I tell you, if you were older, the disgrace of this would stick to you for life, but if you will tell the whole truth about this scoundrel, and put an end to it, we will do the best we can for you.'

She made up a disdainful mouth, and said, 'Thank you.'

'After all,' said Mervyn, turning to Phœbe, 'it is a

joke ! Look at her ! She is a baby ! You need not have made such a rout. This is only a toy-letter to a little girl ; very good practice in German writing.'

'I am engaged to John Hastings heart and hand,' said Bertha in high dignity, little knowing that she thus first disclosed the name.

'Yes, people talk of children being their little wives,' said Mervyn, 'but you are getting too old for such nonsense, though he does not think you so.'

'It is the joint purpose of our lives,' said Bertha.

Mervyn gave his scoffing laugh, and again addressing Phoebe, said, 'If it were you now, or any one with whom he was not in sport, it would be a serious matter. The fellow got himself expelled from Harrow, then was the proverb of even a German university, ran through his means before he was five-and-twenty, is as much at home in the Queen's Bench as I am in this study, has been outlawed, lived on *rouge et noir* at Baden till he got whitewashed when his mother died, and since that has lived on betting, or making himself agreeable to whoever would ask him.'

'Many thanks on the part of your intimate friend,' said Bertha, with suppressed passion.

Mervyn stamped his foot, and Phoebe defended him with, 'Men may associate with those who are no companions for their sisters, Bertha.'

'Contracted minds always accept malignant reports,' was the reply.

'Report,' said Mervyn ; 'I know it as well as I know myself!' then recollecting himself, 'but she does not understand, it is of no use to talk to children. Take her away, Phoebe, and keep her in the nursery till Mr. Crabbe comes to settle what is to be done with her.'

'I insist on having my letter,' said Bertha, with womanly grandeur.

'Let her have it. It is not worth bothering about a mere joke,' said Mervyn, leaning back, wearied of the struggle, in which, provoking as he was, he had received some home thrusts.

Phœbe felt bewildered, and as if she had a perfect stranger on her hands, though Bertha's high tone was, after all, chiefly from her extremity, and by way of reply to her brother's scornful incredulity of her exalted position. She was the first to speak on leaving the library. 'Pray, Phœbe, how came you to tamper with people's letters?'

Phœbe explained.

'From Mervyn and his spy one could expect no delicacy,' said Bertha, 'but in you it was treachery.'

'No, Bertha,' said Phœbe, 'I was grieved to expose you, but it was my duty to clear the innocent by examining the letter, and Mervyn had a right to know what concerned you when you were under his charge. It is our business to save you, and a letter sent in this way does not stand on the same ground as one coming openly under your own name. But I did not read it to him, Bertha—not all.'

'If you had,' said Bertha, more piqued than obliged by this reserve, 'he would have known it was in earnest and not childish nonsense. You saw that it was earnest, Phœbe?' and her defiant voice betrayed a semi-distrust.

'I am afraid it looked very much so,' said Phœbe; 'but, Bertha, that would be saddest of all. I am afraid he might be wicked enough to be trying to get your fortune, for indeed—don't be very much vexed, dearest, I am only saying it for your good—you are not old enough, nor formed, nor pretty enough, really to please a man that has seen so much of the world.'

'He never met so fresh, or original, or so highly cultivated a mind,' said Bertha; 'besides, as to features, there may be different opinions!'

'But, Bertha, how could you ever see him or speak to him?'

'Hearts can find more ways than you dream' said Bertha, with a touch of sentiment; 'we had only to meet for the magnetism of mind to be felt!'

Argument was heartless work. Flattery and the

glory of her conquest had entirely filled the child's mind, and she despised Mervyn and Phœbe far too much for the representations of the one or the persuasions of the other to have the smallest weight with her. Evidently, weariness of her studies and impatience of discipline had led her to lend a willing ear to any distraction, and to give in to the intercourse that both gratified and amused herself and outwitted her governess, and thence the belief in the power of her own charms, and preference for their admirer, were steps easier than appeared credible to Phœbe. From listening in helpless amaze to a miserable round of pertness and philosophy, Phœbe was called downstairs to hear that Mervyn had been examining Jane Hart, and had elicited from her that after having once surprised Mr. Hastings and Miss Bertha in conversation, she had several times conveyed notes between them, and since he had left Beauchamp, she had posted two letters to him from the young lady, but this was the first answer received, directed to herself, to be left at the post-office to be called for.

'Earnest enough on his part,' said Mervyn; 'a regular speculation to patch up his fortune. Well, I knew ill enough of him, as I told you, but I was fool enough to pity him!'

He became silent, and so did Phœbe. She had been too much overset to look the subject fairly in the face, and his very calmness of voice and the absence of abusive epithets were a token that he was perfectly appalled at what he had brought on his sisters. They both sat still some minutes, when she saw him lean back, with his hand to his head, and his eyes closed. 'There's a steeple-chase!' he said, as Phœbe laid her cool hand on his burning brow, and felt the throbbing of the swollen veins of his temples. Both knew that this meant cupping, and they sent in haste for the Hiltonbury doctor, but he was out for the day, and would not return till evening. Phœbe felt dull and stunned, as if her decision had caused all the mischief, and more

and more were following on, and her spirit almost died within her at Mervyn's interjection of rage and suffering.

'Though they curse, yet bless thou,' had of necessity been her rule while clinging to this brother ; a mental ejaculation had become habitual, and this time it brought reaction from her forlorn despondency. She could do something. Twice she had assisted in cupping, and she believed she could perform the operation. No failure could be as hurtful as delay, and she offered to make the attempt. Mervyn growled at her folly, yawned, groaned, looked at his watch, counted the heavy hours, and supposed she must do as she chose.

Her heart rivalled his temples in palpitation, but happily without affecting eye, voice, or hand, and with Lieschen's help the deed was successfully done, almost with equal benefit to the operator and the patient.

Success had put new life into her ; the troubles had been forgotten for the moment, and recurred not as a shameful burthen, caused by her own imprudence, but as a possible turning-point, a subject for action, not for despair, and Phoebe was herself again.

'What's that you are writing?' asked Mervyn, starting from a doze on the sofa.

'A letter to Robert,' she answered, reluctantly.

'I suppose you will put it in the *Times*. No woman can keep a thing to herself.'

'I would tell no one else, but I wanted his advice.'

'Oh, I dare say.'

Phoebe saw that to persist in her letter would utterly destroy the repose that was essential in Mervyn's state, and she laid aside her pen.

'Going to do it out of sight?' he petulantly said.

'No, but at any rate I will wait till Miss Fennimore has talked to Bertha. She will be more willing to listen to her.'

'Because this is the result of her emancipating education. Ha!'

‘No ; but Bertha will attend to her, and cannot say her notions are servile and contracted.’

‘If you say any more, I shall get up and flog them both.’

‘Miss Fennimore is very wise,’ said Phœbe.

‘Why, what has she taught you but the ologies and the Rights of Women ?’

‘The chief thing she teaches,’ said Phœbe, ‘is to attend to what we are doing.’

Mervyn laughed, but did not perceive how those words were the key of Phœbe’s character.

‘Sir John and Lady Raymond and Miss Raymond in the drawing-room.’

Unappreciating the benefit of changing the current of thought, Phœbe lamented their admission, and moved reluctantly to the great rooms, where the guests looked as if they belonged to a more easy and friendly region than to that world of mirrors, damask, and gilding.

Sir John shook hands like an old friend, but his wife was one of those homely ladies who never appear to advantage in strange houses, and Phœbe had not learnt the art of ‘lady of the house’ talk, besides feeling a certain chilliness towards Mervyn’s detractors, which rendered her stiff and formal. To her amaze, however, the languishing talk was interrupted by his entrance : he who regarded Sir John as the cause of his disappointment ; he who had last met Susan Raymond at the time of his rejection ; he whom she had left prostrate among the sofa cushions ; he had absolutely exerted himself to brush his hair and put on coat and boots, yet how horribly ill and nervous he looked, totally devoid of his usual cool assurance, uncertain whether to shake hands with the two ladies, and showing a strange restless eagerness, as though entirely shaken off his balance.

Matters were mended by his entrance. Phœbe liked Lady Raymond from the moment she detected a sign to the vehement Sir John not to keep his host

standing during the discussion of the robbery, and she ventured on expressing her gratitude for his escort on the day of the hunt. Then arose an entreaty to view the scene of the midnight adventure, and the guests were conducted to the gallery, shown where each party had stood, the gas-pipe, the mark of the pistol-shot, and the dressing-room door was opened to display the cabinet, and the window of the escape. To the intense surprise of her brother and sister, Bertha was examining her emeralds.

She came forward quite at her ease, and if she had been ten years a woman could not more naturally have assumed the entertainment of Lady Raymond, talking so readily that Phoebe would have believed the morning's transactions a delusion, but for Mervyn's telegraph of astonishment.

The visitors had been at the Holt, and obtained a promise from Miss Charlecote to spend the ensuing Saturday week at Moorcroft. They begged the sisters to accompany her. Phoebe drew back, though Mervyn hurried out declarations of his not wanting her, and the others never going out, till she hardly knew how it had been decided; but as the guests departed she heard Mervyn severely observing to Bertha—'No, certainly I should not send you to keep company with any well-behaved young ladies.'

'Thank you, I have no desire to associate with commonplace girls,' said Bertha, marching off to the west wing.

'You will go, Phoebe,' said Mervyn.

'Indeed, if I did it would be partly for the sake of giving change to Bertha, and letting her see what nice people really are.'

'Are you crazy, Phoebe? I would not have Bertha with her impudence and her pedantry go among the Raymonds—no, not for the Bank of England.'

Those words darted into Phoebe's mind the perception why Mervyn was, in his strange way, promoting her intercourse with Moorcroft, not only as stamping

her conduct with approval of people of their worth and weight, but as affording him some slight glimmering of hope. She could not but recollect that the extra recklessness of language which had pained her ever since his rejection, had diminished ever since her report of Sir John's notice of her at the justice room. Sister like, she pitied and hoped ; but the more immediate care extinguished all the rest, and she was longing for Miss Fennimore's sympathy, though grieving at the pain the disclosure must inflict. It could not be made till the girls were gone to bed, and at half-past nine, Phœbe sought the schoolroom, and told her tale. There was no answer but an almost convulsive shudder ; her hand was seized, and her finger guided to the line which Miss Fennimore had been reading in the Greek Testament—' By their fruits ye shall know them.'

Rallying before Phœbe could trace what was passing in her mind, she shut the book, turned her chair to the fire, invited Phœbe to another, and was at once the clear-headed, metaphysical governess, ready to discuss this grievous marvel. She was too generous by nature not to have treated her pupils with implicit trust, and this trust had been abused. Looking back, she and Phœbe could recollect moments when Bertha had been unaccounted for, and must have held interviews with Mr. Hastings. She had professed a turn for twilight walks in the garden, and remained out of doors when the autumn evenings had sent the others in, and on the Sunday afternoons, when Phœbe and Maria had been at church, Miss Fennimore reproached herself exceedingly with having been too much absorbed in her own readings to concern herself about the proceedings of a pupil, whose time on that day was at her own disposal. She also thought that there had been communications by look and sign across the pew at church ; and she had remarked, though Phœbe had been too much occupied with her brother to perceive, the restlessness that had settled on Bertha from the time of the departure

of Mervyn's guests, and had once reproved her for lingering, as she thought, to gossip with Jane Hart in her bedroom. 'And now,' said Miss Fennimore, 'she should have a thorough change. Send her to school, calling it punishment, if you please, but chiefly for the sake of placing her among laughing girlish girls of the same age, and, above all, under a thoroughly religious mistress of wide intelligence, and who has never doubted.'

'But we were all to keep together, dear Miss Fennimore—you——'

'One whose mind has always been balancing between aspects of truth may instruct, but cannot educate. Few minds can embrace the moral virtues unless they are based on an undoubted foundation, connected with present devotional warmth, and future hopes and fears. I see this now; I once thought excellence would approve itself, for its own sake, to others, as it did to myself. I regarded Bertha as a fair subject for a full experiment of my system, with good disposition, good abilities, and few counter influences. I meant to cultivate self-relying, unprejudiced, effective good sense, and see—with prejudices have been rooted up restraints!'

'Education seems to me to have little to do with what people turn out,' said Phœbe. 'Look at poor Miss Charlecote and the Sandbrooks.'

'Depend upon it, Phœbe, that whatever harm may have ensued from her errors in detail, those young people will yet bless her for the principle she worked on. You can none of you bless me, for having guided the hands of the watch, and having left the mainspring untouched.'

Miss Fennimore had been, like Helvetius and the better class of encyclopædists, enamoured of the moral virtues, but unable to perceive that they could not be separated from the Christian faith, and she learnt like them that, when doctrine ceased to be prominent, practice went after it. Bertha was her Jacobin—and seemed doubly so

the next morning, when an interview took place, in which the young lady gave her to understand that she, like Phœbe, was devoid of the experience that would enable them to comprehend the sacred mutual duty of souls that once had spoken. Woman was no longer the captive of the seraglio, nor the chronicler of small beer. Intellectual training conferred rights of choice superior to conventional ties; and, as to the infallible discernment of that fifteen year old judgment, had not she the sole premises to go upon, she who alone had been admitted to the innermost of that manly existence?

‘I always knew Jack to be a clever dog,’ said Mervyn, when this was reported to him, ‘but his soft sawder to a priggish metaphysical baby must have been the best fun in the world!’

Mervyn’s great desire was to keep Bertha’s folly as great a secret as possible; and, by his decision, she was told that grace should be granted her till Mr. Crabbe’s arrival, when, unless she had renounced what he called her silly child’s fancy, stringent measures would be taken, and she would be exposed to the family censure.

‘So,’ said Bertha, ‘you expect to destroy the attraction of souls by physical force!’

And Phœbe wrote to Robert a sorrowful letter, chiefly consisting of the utmost pleadings for Mervyn and Bertha that her loving heart could frame. She was happier when she had poured out her troubles, but grieved when no answer came by the next post. Robert’s displeasure must be great—and indeed but too justly so—since all this mischief was the consequence of the disregard of his wishes. Yet justice was hard between brothers and sisters, especially when Mervyn was in such a suffering state, threatened constantly by attacks of his complaint, which were only warded off by severe and weakening treatment. Phœbe was so necessary to his comfort in waiting on him, and trying to while away his tedious hours of inaction and oppression, that she had little time to bestow upon

Bertha, nor, indeed, was talking of any use, as it only gave the young lady an occasion for pouring forth magniloquent sentiments, utterly heedless of the answers. Sad, lonely, and helpless were Phœbe's feelings, but she was patient, and still went on step by step through the strange tangle, attending to Mervyn hour by hour, always with a gently cheerful word and smile, and never trusting herself, even when alone, to think of the turmoil and break up, that must ensue on her guardian's arrival.

All was darkness and perplexity before her, but submission and trust were her refuge, and each day of waiting before the crisis was to her feelings a gain.



CHAPTER IX.

O fy gar ride and fy gar rin
And haste ye to find these traitors agen,
For shees be burnt and hees been slein,
The wearifu gaberlunzie man.
Some rade upon horse, some ran afit,
The wife was wud and out of her wit,
She couldna gang nor yet could she sit,
But aye did curse and ban.

KING JAMES V.

MERVYN and Phœbe were playing at billiards, as a means of inducing him to take exercise enough to make him sleep. The governess and the two girls were gone to the dentist's at Elverslope. The winter's day was closing in, when there was a knock at the door, and they beheld Miss Fennimore, deadly white, and Maria, who flew up to Phœbe, crying—'Bertha's gone, Phœbe!'

'The next up-train stops at Elverslope at 8.30,' said the governess, staring in Mervyn's face, as though repeating a lesson. 'A carriage will be here by seven. I will bring her home, or never return.'

'Gone!'

'It was inexcusable in me, sir,' said Miss Fennimore, resting a hand on the table to support herself. 'I thought it needlessly galling to let her feel herself watched; and at her request, let her remain in the waiting-room while her sister was in the dentist's hands. When, after an hour, Maria was released, she was gone.'

‘Alone?’ cried Phœbe.

‘Alone, I hope. I went to the station; the train had been ten minutes gone; but a young lady, alone, in mourning, and with no luggage but a little bag, had got in there for London. Happily, they did not know her; and it was the parliamentary train, which is five hours on the road. I telegraphed at once to your brother to meet her at the terminus.’

‘I have no hope,’ said Mervyn, doggedly, seating himself on the table, his feet dangling. ‘He will be in the lowest gutter of Whittingtonia, where no one can find him. The fellow will meet that miserable child, go off to Ostend this very night, marry her before to-morrow morning. There’s an end of it!’

‘Where does Mr. Hastings lodge, sir?’

‘Nowhere that I know of. There will be no end of time lost in tracing him! No train before 8.30! I’ll go in at once, and have a special.’

‘They cannot put on one before nine, because of the excursion trains for the cattle-show. I should not have been in time had I driven to catch the express at W.,’ said Miss Fennimore, in her clear voice of desperation. ‘The 8.30 reaches town at 11.23. Will you give me the addresses where I may inquire, sir?’

‘You! I am going myself. You would be of no use,’ said Mervyn, in a stunned, mechanical way; and looking at his watch, he went to give orders.

‘He should not go, Phœbe. In his state the mere journey is a fearful risk.’

‘It can’t be helped,’ said Phœbe. ‘I shall go with him. You stay to take care of Maria. There will be Robert to help us;’ and as the governess would have spoken farther, she held up her hands in entreaty—‘O pray don’t say anything! I can’t go on if I do anything but act.’

Yet in the endeavour to keep her brother quiet, and to husband his powers, Phœbe’s movements and words had rather an additional gentleness and deliberation; and so free from bustle was her whole demeanour, that

he never comprehended her intention of accompanying him till she stepped into the carriage beside him.

‘What’s this? You coming?’

‘I will give you no trouble.’

‘Well, you may help to manage the girl;’ and he lay back, relieved to be off, but already spent by the hurry of the last two hours. Phœbe could sit and—no—not think, except that Robert was at the other end of the line.

The drive seemed to have lasted half the night ere the lamps of Elverslope made constellations in the valley, and the green and red lights of the station loomed out on the hill. They drove into the circle of gaslights, among the vaporous steeds of omnibuses and flies, and entered the station, Phœbe’s veil down, and Mervyn shading his dazzled eyes from the glare. They were half an hour too soon; and while waiting, it occurred to Phœbe to inquire whether a telegram for Beauchamp had been received. Even so, and they must have crossed the express; but a duplicate was brought to them.

‘Safe. We shall be at Elverslope at 10.20, P.M.’

Assuredly Phœbe did not faint, for she stood on her feet; and Mervyn never perceived the suspension of senses, which lasted till she found him for the second time asking whether she would go home or await the travellers at Elverslope.

‘Home,’ she said, instinctively, in her relief forgetting all the distress of what had taken place, so that her sensations were little short of felicity; and as she heard the 8.30 train roaring up, she shed tears of joy at having no concern therewith. The darkness and Mervyn’s silence were comfortable, for she could wipe unseen her showers of tears at each gust of thankfulness that passed over her; and it was long before she could command her voice even to ask her companion whether he were tired. ‘No,’ he said; but the tone was more than half sullen; and at the thought of the meeting between the brothers, poor Phœbe’s heart

seemed to die within her. Against their dark looks and curt sayings to one another she had no courage.

When they reached home, she begged him to go at once to bed, hoping thus to defer the meeting ; but he would not hear of doing so ; and her only good augury was that his looks were pale, languid, and subdued, rather than flushed and excited. Miss Fennimore was in the hall, and he went towards her, saying, in a friendly tone, 'So, Miss Fennimore, you have heard that this unlucky child has given us a fright for nothing.'

The voice in which she assented was hoarse and scarcely audible, and she looked as if twenty years had passed over her head.

'It was all owing to your promptitude,' said Mervyn ; 'a capital thought that telegraph.'

'I am glad,' said Miss Fennimore ; 'but I do not lose sight of my own negligence. It convinces me that I am utterly unfit for the charge I assumed. I shall leave your sisters as soon as new plans can be formed.'

'Why, I'll be bound none of your pupils ever played you such a trick before !'

Miss Fennimore only looked as if this convinced her the more ; but it was no time for the argument, and Phœbe caressingly persuaded her to come into the library and drink coffee with them, judging rightly that she had tasted nothing since morning.

Afterwards Phœbe induced Mervyn to lie on the sofa, and having made every preparation for the travellers, she sat down to wait. She could not read, she could not work ; she felt that tranquillity was needful for her brother, and had learnt already the soothing effect of absolute repose. Indeed, one of the first tokens by which Miss Fennimore had perceived character in Phœbe was her faculty of being still. Only that which has substance can be motionless. There she sat in the lamplight, her head drooping, her hands clasped on her knee, her eyes bent down, not drowsy,

not abstracted, not rigid, but peaceful. Her brother lay in the shade, watching her with a half-fascinated gaze, as though a magnetic spell repressed all inclination to work himself into agitation.

The stillness became an effort at last, but it was resolutely preserved till the frost-bound gravel resounded with wheels. Phœbe rose, Mervyn started up, caught her hand and squeezed it hard. 'Do not let him be hard on me, Phœbe,' he said. 'I could not bear it.'

She had little expected this. Her answer was a mute caress, and she hurried out, but in a tumult of feeling, retreated behind the shelter of a pillar, and silently put her hand on Robert's arm as he stepped out of the carriage.

'Wait,' he whispered, holding her back. 'Hush! I have promised that she shall see no one.'

Bertha descended, unassisted, her veil down, and neither turning to the right nor the left, crossed the hall and went upstairs. Robert took off his overcoat and hat, took a light and followed her, signing that Phœbe should remain behind. She found Mervyn at the library door, like herself rather appalled at the apparition that had swept past them. She put her hand into his, with a kind of common feeling that they were awaiting a strict judge.

Robert soon reappeared, and in a preoccupied way, kissed the one and shook hands with the other, saying, 'She has locked her door, and says she wants nothing. I will try again presently—not you, Phœbe; I could only get her home on condition she should see no one without her own consent. So you had my telegram?'

'We met it at the station. How did you find her?'

'Had the man been written to?' asked Robert.

'No,' said Mervyn; 'we thought it best to treat it as childish nonsense, not worth serious notice, or in fact—I was not equal to writing.'

The weary, dejected tone made Robert look up, contrary to the brothers' usual habit of avoiding one

another's eye, and he exclaimed, 'I did not know! You were not going to London to-night?'

'Worse staying at home,' murmured Mervyn, as, leaning on a corner of the mantelshelf, he rested his head on his hand.

'I was coming with him,' said Phœbe; 'I thought if he gave directions, you could act.'

Robert continued to cast at him glances of dismay and compunction while pursuing the narrative. 'Hastings must have learnt by some means that the speculation was not what he had imagined; for though he met her at Paddington——'

'He did?'

'She had telegraphed to him while waiting at Swindon. He found her out before I did, but he felt himself in a predicament, and I believe I was a welcome sight to him. He begged me to do him the justice to acquit him of all participation in this rash step, and said he had only met Bertha with a view to replacing her in the hands of her family. How it would have been without me, I cannot tell, but I am inclined to believe that he did not know how to dispose of her. She clung to him and turned away from me so decidedly that I was almost grateful for the line he took; and he was obliged to tell her, with many fine speeches, that he could not expose her to share his poverty; and when the poor silly child declared she had enough for both, he told her plainly that it would not be available for six years, and he could not let her—tenderly nurtured, &c., &c. Then supposing me uninformed, he disclaimed all betrayal of your confidence, and represented all that had past as sport with a child, which to his surprise she had taken as earnest.'

'Poor Bertha!' exclaimed Phœbe.

'Pray where did this scene take place?' asked Mervyn.

'On the platform; but it was far too quiet to attract notice.'

'What! you had no fits nor struggles?'

‘I should think not,’ smiled Phœbe.

‘She stood like a statue, when she understood him ; and when he would audaciously have shaken hands with her, she made a distant courtesy, quite dignified. I took her to the waiting-room, and put back her veil. She was crimson, and nearly choking, but she repelled me, and never gave way. I asked if she would sleep at an inn and go home to-morrow ; she said “No.” I told her I could not take her to my place because of the curates. “I’ll go to a sisterhood,” she said ; and when I told her she was in no mood to be received there, she answered, “I don’t care.” Then I proposed taking her to Augusta, but that was worse ; and at last I got her to come home in the dark, on my promise that she should see no one till she chose. Not a word has she since uttered.’

‘Could he really have meant it all in play ?’ said Phœbe ; ‘yet there was his letter.’

‘I see it all,’ said Mervyn. ‘I was an ass to suppose such needy rogues could come near girls of fortune without running up the scent. As I told Phœbe, I know they had some monstrous ideas of the amount, which I never thought it worth my while to contradict. I imagine old Jack only intended a promising little flirtation, capable of being brought to bear if occasion served, but otherwise to be cast aside as child’s play. Nobody could suspect such an inflammable nature with that baby face ; but it seems she was ready to eat her fingers with dulness in the school-room, and had prodigious notions of the rights of woman ; so she took all he said most seriously, and met him more than half-way. Then he goes to London, gets better information, looks at the will in Doctors’ Commons, maybe, finds it a slowish speculation, and wants to let her down easy ; whereof she has no notion, writes two letters to his one, as we know, gets desperate, and makes this excursion.’

Robert thoughtfully said ‘Yes ;’ and Phœbe, though she did not like to betray it, mentally owned that the

intercepted letter confirmed Mervyn's opinion, being evidently meant to pacify what was inconveniently ardent and impassioned, without making tangible promises or professions.

The silence was broken by Mervyn. 'There! I shall go to bed. Phœbe, when you see that poor child, tell her not to be afraid of me, for the scrape was of my making, so don't be sharp with her.'

'I hope not,' said Robert, gravely; 'I am beginning to learn that severity is injustice, not justice. Good night, Mervyn; I hope this has not done you harm.'

'I am glad not to be at Paddington this minute,' said Mervyn. 'You will stay and help us through this business. It is past us.'

'I will stay as long as I can, if you wish it.'

Phœbe's fervent 'Thank you!' was for both. She had never heard such friendly tones between those two, though Mervyn's were still half sullen, and chiefly softened by dejection and weariness.

'Why, Phœbe,' cried Robert, as the door closed, 'how could you not tell me this?'

'I thought I had told you that he was very unwell.'

'Unwell! I never saw any one so much altered.'

'He is at his best when he is pale. The attacks are only kept off by reducing him, and he must be materially better to have no threatening after such a day as this.'

'Well, I am glad you have not had the letter that I posted only to-day!'

'I knew you were displeased,' said Phœbe, 'and you see you were quite right in not wishing us to stay here; but you forgive us now—Mervyn and me, I mean.'

'Don't couple yourself with him, Phœbe!'

'Yes, I must; for we both equally misjudged, and he blames himself more than any one.'

'His looks plead for him as effectually as you can do, Phœbe, and rebuke me for having fancied you weak and perverse in remaining after the remonstrance.'

‘I do not wonder at it,’ said Phœbe ; ‘but it is over now, and don’t let us talk about it. I want nothing to spoil the comfort of knowing that I have you here.’

‘I have a multitude of things to say, but you look sleepy.’

‘Yes, I am afraid I am. I should like to sit up all night, to make the most of you, but I could not keep awake.’

Childlike, she no sooner had some one on whom to repose her care than slumber claimed its due, and she went away to her thankful rest, treasuring the thought of Robert’s presence, and resting in the ineffable blessing of being able to overlook the thorns in gratitude for the roses.

Bertha did not appear in the morning. Robert went to her door, and was told that she would see no one ; and Phœbe’s entreaties for admission were met with silence, till he forbade their repetition. ‘It only hardens her,’ he said ; ‘we must leave her to herself.’

‘She will not eat, she will be ill !’

‘If she do not yield at dinner-time, Lieschen shall carry food to her, but she shall not have the pleasure of disappointing you. Sullenness must be left to weary itself out.’

‘Is not this more shame than sullenness ?’

‘True shame hides its face and confesses—sullen shame hides like Adam. If hers had not been stubborn, it would have melted at your voice. She must wait to hear it again, till she have learnt to crave for it.’

He looked so resolute that Phœbe durst plead no longer, but her heart sank at the thought of the obstinate force of poor Bertha’s nature. Persistence was innate in the Fulmorts, and it was likely to be a severe and lasting trial whether Robert or Bertha would hold out the longest. Since he had captured her, however, all were relieved tacitly to give her up to his management ; and at dinner-time, on his stern assurance that, unless she would accept food, the door should be forced,

she admitted some sandwiches and tea, and desired to have her firing replenished, but would allow no one to enter.

Robert, at Mervyn's earnest entreaty, arranged to remain over the Sunday. The two brothers met shyly at first, using Phœbe as a medium of communication ; but they drew nearer after a time, in the discussion of the robbery, and Robert presently found means of helping Mervyn, by letter writing, and taking business off his hands to which Phœbe was unequal. Both concurred in insisting that Phœbe should keep her engagement to the Raymonds for the morrow, as the only means of preventing Bertha's escapade from making a sensation ; and by night she became satisfied that not only would the brothers keep the peace in her absence, but that a day's *tête-à-tête* might rather promote their good understanding.

Still, she was in no mood to enjoy, when she had to leave Bertha's door still unopened, and the only comfort she could look to was in the conversation with Miss Charlecote on the way. From her, there was no concealing what had happened, and, to Phœbe's surprise, she was encouraging. From an external point of view, she could judge better than those more nearly concerned, and her elder years made her more conscious what time could do. She would not let the adventure be regarded as a lasting blight on Bertha's life. Had the girl been a few years older, she could never have held up her head again ; but as it was, Honor foretold that, by the time she was twenty, the adventure would appear incredible. It was not to be lightly passed over, but she must not be allowed to lose her self-respect, nor despair of regaining a place in the family esteem.

Phœbe could not imagine her ever recovering the being thus cast off by her first love.

'My dear, believe me, it was not love at all, only mystery and the rights of woman. Her very demonstrativeness shows that it was not the heart, but the vanity.'

Phœbe tried to believe, and at least was refreshed by the sympathy, so as to be able, to her own surprise, to be pleased and happy at Moorcroft, where Sir John and his wife were full of kindness, and the bright household mirth of the sons and daughters showed Phœbe some of the benefit Miss Fennimore expected for Bertha from girl friends. One of the younger ones showed her a present in preparation for 'cousin Cecily,' and embarked in a list of the names of the cousinhood at Sutton; and though an elder sister decidedly closed young Harriet's mouth, yet afterwards Phœbe was favoured with a sight of a photograph of the dear cousin, and inferred from it that the young lady's looks were quite severe enough to account for her cruelty.

The having been plunged into a new atmosphere was good for Phœbe, and she brought home so cheerful a face, that even the news of Bertha's continued obstinacy could not long sadden it, in the enjoyment of the sight of Robert making himself necessary to Mervyn, and Mervyn accepting his services as if there had never been anything but brotherly love between them. She could have blessed Bertha for having thus brought them together, and felt as if it were a dream too happy to last.

'What an accountant Robert is!' said Mervyn. 'It is a real sacrifice not to have him in the business! What a thing we should have made of it, and he would have taken all the bother!'

'We have done very well to-day,' was Robert's account; 'I don't know what can have been the matter before, except my propensity for making myself disagreeable.'

Phœbe went to bed revolving plans for softening Bertha, and was fast asleep when the lock of her door was turned. As she awoke, the terrors of the robbery were upon her far more strongly than at the actual moment of its occurrence; but the voice was familiar, though thin, weak, and gasping. 'O Phœbe, I've done it! I've starved myself. I am dying;' and the sound

became a shrill cry. 'The dark ! O save me !' There was a heavy fall, and Phœbe, springing to the spot where the white vision had sunk down, strove to lift a weight, cold as marble, without pulse or motion. She contrived to raise it, and drag it with her into her own bed, though in deadly terror at the icy touch and prone helplessness, and she was feeling in desperation for the bell rope, when to her great relief, light and steps approached, and Robert spoke. Alas ! his candle only served to show the ghastly, senseless face.

'She has starved herself !' said Phœbe, with affright.

'A swoon, don't be afraid,' said Robert, who was dressed, and had evidently been watching. 'Try to warm her ; I will fetch something for her ; we shall soon bring her round.'

'A swoon, only a swoon,' Phœbe was forced to reiterate to herself to keep her senses and check the sobbing screams that swelled in her throat during the hour-like moments of his absence. She rose, and partly dressed herself in haste, then strove to chafe the limbs ; but her efforts only struck the deathly chill more deeply into her own heart.

He brought some brandy with which they moistened her lips, but still in vain, and Phœbe's dismay was redoubled as she saw his terror. 'It *must* be fainting,' he repeated, 'but I had better send for Jackson. May God have mercy on us all—this is my fault !'

'Her lips move,' gasped Phœbe, as she rubbed the temples with the stimulant.

'Thank God !' and again they put the spoon to her lips, as the nostrils expanded, the eyes opened, and she seemed to crave for the cordial. But vainly Robert raised her in his arms, and Phœbe steadied her own trembling hand to administer it, there were only choking, sobbing efforts for words, resulting in hoarse shrieks of anguish.

Mervyn and Miss Fennimore, entering nearly at the same moment, found Phœbe pale as death, urging composure with a voice of despair ; and Robert with looks of

horror that he could no longer control, holding up the sinking child, her face livid, her eyes strained. 'I can't, I can't,' she cried, with frightful catches of her breath ; 'I shall die——' and the screams recurred.

Mervyn could not bear the spectacle for an instant, and fled only to return to listen outside. Miss Fennimore brought authority and presence of mind. 'Hysterical,' she said. 'There, lay her down ; don't try again yet.'

'It is hunger,' whispered the trembling Phœbe ; but Miss Fennimore only signed to be obeyed, and decidedly saying, 'Be quiet, Bertha, don't speak,' the habit of submission silenced all but the choking sobs. She sent Robert to warm a shawl, ordered away the frightened maids, and enforced stillness, which lasted till Bertha had recovered breath, when she sobbed out again, 'Robert ! Where is he ? I shall die ! He must pray ! I can't die !'

Miss Fennimore bade Robert compose his voice to pray aloud, and what he read tranquillized all except Mervyn, who understood this to mean the worst, and burst away to sit cowering in suspense over his fire. Miss Fennimore then offered Bertha a morsel of roll dipped in port wine, but fasting and agitation had really produced a contraction of the muscles of the throat, and the attempt failed. Bertha was dreadfully terrified, and Phœbe could hardly control herself, but she was the only person unbanished by Miss Fennimore. Even Robert's distress became too visible for the absolute calm by which the governess hoped to exhaust the hysteria while keeping up vitality by outward applications of warmth and stimulants, and from time to time renewing the endeavour to administer nourishment.

It was not till two terrible hours had passed that Phœbe came to the school-room and announced to her brothers that after ten minutes' doze, Bertha had waked, and swallowed a spoonful of arrowroot and wine without choking. She could not restrain her sobs, and wept uncontrollably as Mervyn put his arm round her.

He was the most composed of the three, for her powers had been sorely strained, and Robert had suffered most of all.

He had on this day suspected that Bertha was burning the provisions forced on her, but he had kept silence, believing that she would thus reduce herself to a more amenable state than if she were angered by compulsion, and long before serious harm could ensue. Used to the sight of famine, he thought inanition would break the spirit without injuring the health. Many a time had he beheld those who professed to have tasted nothing for two days, trudge off tottering but cheerful, with a soup-ticket, and he had not calculated on the difference between the children of want and the delicately nurtured girl; full of overwrought feeling. Though he had been watching in loving intercession for the unhappy child, and had resolved on forcing his way to her in the morning, he felt as if he had played the part of the Archbishop of Pisa, and that, had she perished in her fearful determination, her blood would have been on himself. He was quite overcome, and forced to hurry to his own room to compose himself, ere he could return to inquire further; but there was little more to hear. Miss Fennimore desired to be alone with the patient; Phœbe allowed herself to be laid on the sofa and covered with shawls; Mervyn returned to his bed, and Robert still watched.

There was a great calm after the storm, and Phœbe did not wake till the dim wintry dawn was struggling with the yellow candlelight, and a consultation was going on in low tones between Robert and the governess, both wan and haggard in the uncomfortable light, and their words not more cheering than their looks. Bertha had become feverish, passing from restless, talking sleep to startled, painful waking, and Miss Fennimore wished Dr. Martyn to be sent for. Phœbe shivered with a cold chill of disappointment as she gathered their meaning, and coming forward, entreated the watchers to lie down to rest, while she relieved guard; but nothing would persuade Miss Fennimore to relinquish her post; and soon

Phœbe had enough to do elsewhere ; for her own peculiar patient, Mervyn, was so ill throughout the morning, that she was constantly employed in his room, and Robert looking on and trying to aid her, hated himself doubly for his hasty judgments.

Maria alone could go to church on that Sunday morning, and her version of the state of affairs brought Miss Charlecote to Beauchamp to offer her assistance. She saw Dr. Martyn, and undertook the painful preliminary explanation, and she saw him again after his inspection of Bertha.

‘That’s a first-rate governess ! Exactly so ! An educational hot-bed. Why can’t people let girls dress dolls and trundle hoops as they used to do ?’

‘I have never thought Bertha oppressed by her lessons.’

‘So much the worse ! Those who can’t learn, or won’t learn, take care of themselves. Those who have a brain and use it are those that suffer ! To hear that poor child blundering algebra in her sleep might be a caution to mothers !’

‘Did you ever see her before, so as to observe the little hesitation in her speech ?’

‘No, they should have mentioned that.’

‘It is generally very slight ; but one of them—I think Maria—told me that she always stammered more after lessons’——

‘The blindness of people ! As if that had not been a sufficient thermometer to show when they were overworking her brain ! Why, not one of these Fulmorts has a head that will bear liberties being taken with it !’

‘Can you let us hope that this whole affair came from an affection of the brain ?’

‘The elopement ! No ; I can’t flatter you that health or sanity were in fault there. Nor is it delirium now ; the rambling is only in sleep. But the three days’ fast——’

‘Two days, was it not ?’

‘Three. She took nothing since breakfast on Thursday.’

‘Have you made out how she passed the last two days?’

‘I wrung out some account. I believe this would never have occurred to her if her brother had given her a sandwich at Paddington; but she came home exhausted into a distaste for food, which other feelings exaggerated into a fancy to die rather than face the family. She burnt the provisions in a rage at their being forced on her, and she slept most of the time—torpor without acute suffering. Last night in sleep she lost her hold of her resolution, and woke to the sense of self-preservation.’

‘An infinite mercy!’

‘Not that the spirit is broken; all her strength goes to sullenness, and I never saw a case needing greater judgment. Now that she is reduced, the previous overwork tells on her, and it will be a critical matter to bring her round. Who can be of use here? Not the married sisters, I suppose? Miss Fulmort is all that a girl can be at nineteen or twenty, but she wants age.’

‘You think it will be a bad illness?’

‘It may not assume an acute form, but it may last a good while; and if they wish her to have any health again, they must mind what they are about.’

Honora felt a task set to her. She must be Phoebe’s experience as far as her fifty years could teach her to deal with a little precocious rationalist in a wild travestie of Thekla. *Ich habe geliebt und geleet* was the farewell laid on Bertha’s table. What a Thekla and what a Max! O profanation! But Honor felt Bertha a charge of her own, and her aid was the more thankfully accepted that the patient was quite beyond Phoebe. She had too long rebelled against her sister, to find rest in her guardianship. Phoebe’s voice disposed her to resistance, her advice to wrangling, and Miss Fennimore alone had power to enforce what was needful; and so devoted was she, that

Honor could scarcely persuade her to lie down to rest for a few hours.

Honor was dismayed at the change from the childish *espiègle* roundness of feature to a withered, scathed countenance, singularly old, and mournfully contrasting with the mischievous-looking waves and rings of curly hair upon the brow. Premature playing at passion had been sport with edged tools. Sleeping, the talk was less, however, of the supposed love, than of science and metaphysics; waking, there was silence between weakness and sullenness.

Thus passed day after day, always in the same feverish lethargic oppression which baffled medical skill, and kept the sick mind beyond the reach of human aid; and so uniform were the days, that her illness seemed to last for months instead of weeks.

Miss Fennimore insisted on the night-watching for her share. Phœbe divided with her and Lieschen the morning cares; and Miss Charlecote came in the forenoon and stayed till night, but slept at home, whither Maria was kindly invited; but Phœbe did not like to send her away without herself or Lieschen, and Robert undertook for her being inoffensive to Mervyn. In fact, she was obliging and unobtrusive, only speaking when addressed, and a willing messenger. Mervyn first forgot her presence, then tolerated her saucer eyes, then found her capable of running his errands, and lastly began to care to please her. Honora had devised employment for her by putting a drawer of patchwork at her disposal, and suggesting that she should make a work-bag for each of Robert's 139 school-girls; and the occupation this afforded her was such a public benefit, that Robert was content to pay the tax of telling her the destination of each individual bag, and being always corrected if he twice mentioned the same name. When Mervyn dozed in his chair, she would require from Robert 'stories' of his scholars; and it even came to pass that Mervyn would recur to what had

then passed, as though he had not been wholly asleep.

Mervyn was chiefly dependent on his brother for conversation, entertainment, and assistance in his affairs; and though not a word passed upon their differences, and no professions were made, the common anxiety, and Mervyn's great need of help, had swept away all traces of unfriendliness. Not even when children in the nursery had they been so free from variance or bitterness as while waiting the issue of their sister's illness; both humbled, both feeling themselves in part the cause, each anxious to cheer and console the other—one, weak, subdued, dependent—the other, considerate, helpful, and eager to atone for past harshness. Strange for brothers to wait till the ages of twenty-nine and twenty-seven to find out that they really did prefer each other to every one else, in spite of the immense differences between their characters and habits!

'I say,' asked Mervyn, one day, when resting after having brought on giddiness and confusion by directing Robert how to answer a letter from the office, 'what would you do with this bore of a business, if it came to you?'

'Get rid of it,' said Robert, surveying him with startled eyes.

'Aye—sell it, and get the devilry, as you call it, multiplied to all infinity.'

'Close it.'

'Boil soup in the coppers, bake loaves in the furnaces? It makes you look at me perilously—and a perilous game you would find it, most likely to swallow this place and all the rest. Why, you, who had the making of a man of business in you, might reflect that you can't annihilate property without damage to other folks.'

'I did not reflect,' said Robert, gravely; 'the matter never occurred to me.'

'What is the result of your reflection now?'

‘Nothing at all,’ was the somewhat impatient reply. ‘I trust never to have to consider. Get it out of my hands at any sacrifice, so as it may do the least harm to others. Had I no other objection to that business, I should have no choice.’

‘Your cloth? Well, that’s a pity, for I see how it could be mitigated, so as to satisfy your scruples;’ and Mervyn, whose head could work when it was not necessary, detailed a scheme for gradually contracting the most objectionable traffic, and adopting another branch of the trade.

‘Excellent,’ said Robert, assenting with delight at each pause. ‘You will carry it out.’

‘I? I’m only a reprobate distiller.’

There it ended, and Robert must have patience.

The guardian, Mr. Crabbe, came as soon as his gout would permit, and hemmed and grunted in reply to the strange narrative into which he had come to inquire. Acting was as yet impossible; Mervyn was forbidden to transact business, and Bertha was far too ill for the removal of the young ladies to be attempted. Miss Fennimore did indeed formally give in her resignation of her situation, but she was too necessary as a nurse for the time of her departure to be fixed, and Mr. Crabbe was unable to settle anything definitively. He found Robert—who previously had spurred him to strong measures—bent on persuading him to lenity, and especially on keeping Phœbe with Mervyn; and after a day and night of perplexity, the old gentleman took his leave, promising to come again on Bertha’s recovery, and to pacify the two elder sisters by representing the condition of Beauchamp, and that for the present the Incumbent of St. Matthew’s and Miss Charlecote might be considered as sufficient guardians for the inmates. ‘Or if their Ladyships thought otherwise,’ he said, with a twinkle in his eye, ‘why did they not come down themselves?’

Mervyn made a gesture of horror, but all knew that

there was little danger. Augusta was always 'so low' at the sight of illness, and unless Phœbe had been the patient out of sight, Juliana would not have brought her husband; obvious as would have been the coming of an elder sister when the sickness of the younger dragged on so slowly and wearily.

No one went through so much as Miss Fennimore. Each hour of her attendance on Bertha stamped the sense of her own failure, and of the fallacies to which her life had been dedicated. The sincerity, honour, and modesty that she had inculcated, had been founded on self-esteem alone; and when they had proved inadequate to prevent their breach, their outraged relics had prompted the victim to despair and die. Intellectual development and reasoning powers had not availed one moment against inclination and self-will, and only survived in the involuntary murmurs of a disordered nervous system. All this had utterly overthrown that satisfaction in herself and her own moral qualities in which Miss Fennimore had always lived; she had become sensible of the deep flaws in all that she had admired in her own conduct; and her reason being already prepared by her long and earnest study to accept the faith in its fulness, she had begun to crave after the Atoning Mercy of which she sorely felt the need. But if it be hard for one who has never questioned to take home individually the efficacy of the great Sacrifice, how much harder for one taught to deny the Godhead which rendered the Victim worthy to satisfy Eternal Justice? She accepted the truth, but the gracious words would not reach her spirit; they were to her as a feast in a hungry man's dream. Robert alone was aware of the struggles through which she was passing, and he could do little in direct aid of her; the books—even the passages of Scripture that he found for her—seemed to fall short; it was as though the sufferer in the wilderness lay in sight of the brazen serpent, but his eyes were holden that he could not see it.

Only the governess's strong and untaxed health could have carried her through her distress and fatigue, for she continued to engross the most trying share of the nursing, anxious to shield Phœbe from even the knowledge of all the miseries of Bertha's nights, when the poor child would start on her pillow with a shriek, gaze wildly round, trembling in every limb, the dew starting on her brow, face well-nigh convulsed, teeth chattering, and strange, incoherent words—

'A dream, only a dream!' she murmured, recovering consciousness.

'What was only a dream?' asked Miss Fennimore, one night.

'Oh, nothing!' but she still shivered; then striving to catch hold of the broken threads of her philosophy, 'How one's imagination is a prey to—to—what is it? To—to old impressions—when one is weak.'

'What kind of impressions?' asked Miss Fennimore, resolved to probe the matter.

Bertha, whose defect of speech was greatly increased by weakness, was long in making her answer comprehensible; but Miss Fennimore gathered it at last, and it made her spirit quake, for it referred to the terrors beyond the grave. Yet she firmly answered—

'Such impressions may not always result from weakness.'

'I thought,' cried Bertha, rising on her elbow, 'I thought that an advanced state of civilization dispenses with sectarian—I mean superstitious—literal threats.'

'No civilization can change those decrees, nor make them unmerited,' said Miss Fennimore, sadly.

'How?' repeated Bertha, frowning. 'You, too? You don't mean that? You are not one of the narrow minds that want to doom their fellow-creatures for ever.' Her eyes had grown large, round, and bright, and she clutched Miss Fennimore's hand, gasping, 'Say, not for ever!'

'My poor child! did I ever teach you it was not?'

‘You thought so!’ cried Bertha; ‘enlightened people think so. O say—only say it does not last!’

‘Bertha, I cannot. God forgive me for the falsehoods to which I led you, the realities I put aside from you.’

Bertha gave a cry of anguish, and sank back exhausted, damps of terror on her brow; but she presently cried out, ‘If it would not last! I can’t bear the thought! I can’t bear to live, but I can’t die! Oh! who will save me?’

To Miss Fennimore’s lips rose the words of St. Paul to the jailer.

‘Believe! believe!’ cried Bertha, petulantly; ‘believe what?’

‘Believe that He gave His Life to purchase your safety and mine through that Eternity.’

And Miss Fennimore sank on her knees, weeping and hiding her face. The words which she had gazed at, and listened to, in vain longing, had—even as she imparted them—touched herself in their fulness. She had seen the face of Truth, when, at Mrs. Fulmort’s death-bed, she had heard Phœbe speak of the Blood that cleanseth from all sin. Then it had been a moment’s glimpse. She had sought it earnestly ever since, and at length it had come to nestle within her own bosom. It was not sight, it was touch—it was embracing and holding fast.

Alas! the sight was hidden from Bertha. She moodily turned aside in vexation, as though her last trust had failed her. In vain did Miss Fennimore, feeling that she had led her to the brink of an abyss of depth unknown, till she was tottering on the verge, lavish on her the most tender cares. They were requited with resentful gloom, that the governess felt to be so just towards herself that she would hardly have been able to lift up her head but for the new reliance that gave peace to deepening contrition.

That was a bad night, and the day was worse. Bertha had more strength, but more fever; and the

much-enduring Phœbe could hardly be persuaded to leave her to Miss Charlecote at dusk, and air herself with her brothers in the garden. The weather was close and misty, and Honora set open the door to admit the air from the open passage window. A low, soft, lulling sound came in, so much softened by distance that the tune alone showed that it was an infant school ditty sung by Maria, while rocking herself in her low chair over the schoolroom fire. Turning to discover whether the invalid were annoyed by it, Honor beheld the hard, keen little eyes intently fixed, until presently they filled with tears; and with a heavy sigh, the words broke forth, 'Oh! to be as silly as she is!'

'As *selig*, you mean,' said Honor, kindly.

'It is the same thing,' she said, with a bitter ring in her poor worn voice.

'No, it is not weakness that makes your sister happy. She was far less happy before she learnt to use her powers lovingly.'

With such earnestness that her stuttering was very painful to hear, she exclaimed, 'Miss Charlecote, I can't recollect things—I get puzzled—I don't say what I want to say. Tell me, is not my brain softening or weakening? You know Maria had water on the head once!' and her accents were pitiably full of hope.

'Indeed, my dear, you are not becoming like Maria.'

'If I were,' said Bertha, certainly showing no such resemblance, 'I suppose I should not know it. I wonder whether Maria be ever conscious of her *Ich*,' said she, with a weary sigh, as if this were a companion whence she could not escape.

'Dear child, your *Ich* would be best set aside by living to others, who only seek to make you happier.'

'I wish they would let me alone. If they had, there would have been an end of it.'

'An end—no indeed, my poor child!'

'There!' cried Bertha; 'that's what it is to live! To be shuddered at!'

'No, Bertha, I did not shudder at the wild delusion

and indiscretion, which may be lived down and redeemed, but at the fearful act that would have cut you off from all hope, and chained you to yourself, and such a self, for ever, never to part from the shame whence you sought to escape. Yes, surely there must have been pleading in Heaven to win for you that instant's relenting. Rescued twice over, there must be some work for you to do, something to cast into shade all that has passed.'

'It will not destroy memory!' she said, with hopeless indifference.

'No; but you may be so occupied with it as to rise above your present pain and humiliation, and remember them only to gather new force from your thankfulness.'

'What, that I was made a fool of?' cried Bertha, with sharpness in her thin voice.

'That you were brought back to the new life that is before you.'

Though Bertha made no answer, Honor trusted that a beginning had been made, but only to be disappointed, for the fever was higher the next day, and Bertha was too much oppressed for speech. The only good sign was that in the dusk she desired that the door should be left open, in case Maria should be singing. It was the first preference she had evinced. The brothers were ready to crown Maria, and she sang with such good-will that Phoebe was forced to take precautions, fearing lest the harmony should lose 'the modest charm of not too much.'

There ensued a decided liking for Maria's company, partly no doubt from her envied deficiency, and her ignorance of the extent of Bertha's misdemeanour, partly because there was less effort of mind in intercourse with her. Her pleasure in waiting on her sister was likewise so warm and grateful, that Bertha felt herself conferring a favour, and took everything from her in a spirit very different from the dull submission towards Miss Fennimore or the peevish

tyranny over Phœbe. Towards no one else save Miss Charlecote did she show any favour, for though their conversation was never even alluded to, it had probably left a pleasant impression, and possibly she was entertained by Honor's systematic habit of talking of the world beyond to the other nurses in her presence.

But these likings were far more scantily shown than her dislikes, and it was hard for her attendants to acquiesce in the physician's exhortations to be patient till her spirits and nerves should have recovered the shock. Even the entrance of a new housemaid threw her into a trepidation which she was long in recovering, and any proposal of seeing any person beyond the few who had been with her from the first, occasioned trembling, entreaties, and tears.

Phœbe, after her brief heroineship, had lapsed into quite a secondary position. In the reaction of the brothers' feeling towards each other, they almost left her out. Both were too sure of her to be eager for her; and besides, as Bertha slowly improved, Mervyn's prime attention was lavished on the endeavour to find what would give her pleasure. And in the sick room, Miss Fennimore and Miss Charlecote could better rule; while Maria was preferred as a companion. Honor often admired to see how content Phœbe was to forego the privilege of waiting on her sister, preparing pleasures and comforts for her in the background, and committing them to the hands whence they would be most welcome, without a moment's grudge at her own distastefulness to the patient. She seemed to think it the natural consequence of the superiority of all the rest, and fully acquiesced. Sometimes a tear would rise for a moment at Bertha's rude petulance, but it was dashed off for a resolute smile, as if with the feeling of a child against tears, and she as plainly felt the background her natural position, as if she had never been prominent from circumstances. Whatever was to be done, she did it, and she was far more grateful to Mervyn for loving Robert and enduring Maria,

than for any preference to herself. Always finding cause for thanks, she rejoiced even in the delay caused by Bertha's illness, and in Robert's stay in his brother's home, where she had scarcely dared to hope ever to have seen him again. Week after week he remained, constantly pressed by Mervyn to delay his departure, and not unwillingly yielding, since he felt that there was a long arrear of fraternal kindness to be made up, and that while St. Matthew's was in safe hands, he might justly consider that his paramount duty was to his brother and sisters in their present need. At length, however, the Lent services claimed him in London, and affairs at Beauchamp were so much mended, that Phœbe owned that they ought no longer to detain him from his parish, although Bertha was only able to be lifted to a couch, took little notice of any endeavour to interest her, and when he bade her farewell, hardly raised eye or hand in return.



CHAPTER X.

When all is done or said,
In th' end this shall you find,
He most of all doth bathe in bliss
That hath a quiet mind.

LORD VAUX.



ROBERT had promised to return in the end of March, to be present at the Assizes, when the burglars would be tried, and he did not come alone. Mr. Crabbe judged it time to inspect Beauchamp and decide for his wards ; and Lady Bannerman, between Juliana's instigations, her own pride in being connected with a trial, and her desire to appropriate Phœbe, decided on coming down with the Admiral to see how matters stood, and to give her vote in the family council.

Commissions from Mervyn had pursued Robert since his arrival in town, all for Bertha's amusement, and he brought down, by special orders, a musical-box, all Leech's illustrations, and a small Maltese dog, like a spun-glass lion, which Augusta had in vain proposed to him to exchange for her pug, which was getting fat and wheezy, and would amuse Bertha just as well.' Lady Bannerman hardly contained her surprise when Maria, as well as Mervyn and Phœbe, met her in the hall, seemingly quite tame and at her ease. Mervyn looked better, and in answer to inquiries for Bertha, answered, ' Oh, getting on, decidedly ; we have her in the garden. She might drive out, only she has such a horror of meeting any one ; but her spirits are better,

I really thought she would have laughed yesterday when Maria was playing with the kitten. Ha ! the dog, have you got him, Robert ? Well, if this does not amuse her, I do not know what will.'

And at the first possible moment, Mervyn, Maria, and the Maltese were off through the open window. Robert asked what Phœbe thought of Mervyn. She said he was much stronger, but the doctor was not satisfied that the mischief was removed, and feared that a little want of care or any excitement might bring on another attack. She dreaded the morrow on his account.

'Yes,' said the elder sister, 'I don't wonder ! A most atrocious attempt ! I declare I could hardly make up my mind to sleep in the house ! Mind you swear to them all, my dear.'

'I only saw Smithson clearly.'

'Oh, never mind ; if they have not done that, they have done something quite as bad ; and I should never sleep a night again in peace if they got off. Was it true that they had packed up all the liqueurs ?'

Phœbe exonerated them from this aggravated guilt.

'I say, my dear, would you tell the butler to bring up some of the claret that was bought at Mr. Rolleston's auction. I told Sir Nicholas that he should taste it, and I don't like to mention it to poor Mervyn, as he must not drink wine.'

'There is some up,' said Phœbe ; 'Mervyn fancied that Bertha liked it.'

'My dear, you don't give Bertha that claret ! you don't know what poor papa gave for it.'

'If Bertha would only enjoy anything, Mervyn would be overjoyed.'

'Yes, it is as Juliana says ; it is nothing but spoiling that ails her,' said Augusta. 'Did you say she was in the garden ? I may as well go and see her.'

This Phœbe withstood with entreating looks, and representations that Bertha had as yet seen no fresh face, and was easily startled ; but her sister insisted

that she was no stranger, and could do no harm, till Phœbe had no choice but to run on and announce her, in the hope that surprise might lessen the period of agitation.

In the sunniest and most sheltered walk was a wheeled chair, over which Miss Fennimore held a parasol, while Mervyn and Maria were anxiously trying to win some token of pleasure from the languid, inanimate occupant to whom they were displaying the little dog. As the velvet-bordered silk, crimson shawl, and purple bonnet neared the dark group, a nervous tremor shot through the sick girl's frame, and partly starting up, she made a gesture of scared entreaty ; but Lady Bannerman's portly embrace and kind inquiries were not to be averted. She assured the patient that all was well since she could get out of doors, the air would give her a famous appetite, and if she was able to drink claret, she would be strong enough in a day or two to come up to Juliana in London, where change and variety would set her up at once.

Bertha scarcely answered, but made an imperious sign to be drawn to the west wing, and as Phœbe succeeded in turning Augusta's attention to the hot-houses, Mervyn beckoned to Robert, rather injudiciously, for his patient was still tremulous from the first greeting. Her face had still the strangely old appearance, her complexion was nearly white, her hair thin and scanty, the almost imperceptible cast of the eye which had formerly only served to give character to her arch expression, had increased to a decided blemish ; and her figure, which had shot up to woman's height, seemed to bend like a reed as Mervyn supported her to the sofa in the schoolroom. With nervous fright, she retained his hand, speaking with such long, helpless hesitation, that Robert caught only the words ' Juliana — never — '

'Never, never,' answered Mervyn ; ' don't fear ! We'll prevent that, Robert ; tell her that she shall not fall into Juliana's hands—no, nor do anything against her will.'

Only after repeated assurances from both brothers that Augusta should not carry her off in her present state, did she rest tranquilly on the sofa, while Mervyn, after waiting on her assiduously, with touching tenderness, as if constantly imploring her to be pleased, applied himself to playing with the dog, watching her face for some vestige of interest, and with so much gratification at the slightest sign of amusement as to show how melancholy must have been the state compared with which this was improvement.

After slowly attaining her present amount of convalescence, she had there stopped short, without progress in strength or spirits, and alarms constantly varying for her head, spine, and lungs, as if the slightest accidental cause might fix permanent disease in either quarter; and to those who daily watched her, and knew the miserable effects produced by the merest trifles, it was terrible to think that her destination was in the hands of a comparative stranger, urged on by the dull Augusta and the acid Juliana. Mervyn needed no severer penalty for having forfeited his right to protect his sisters; attached to them and devoted to Bertha as the anxieties of the spring had rendered him. The sight of Bertha had so far modified Lady Bannerman's scheme, that she proposed herself to conduct the three to Brighton, and there remain till the London season, when the two younger could be disposed of in some boarding school, and Phoebe conducted to Albury-street. Mr. Crabbe did not appear averse to this offer, and there was a correctness about it which rendered it appalling to those who had not Phoebe's quiet trust that no part of it would be allowed to happen unless it were good for them. And she found her eldest brother so much subdued and less vituperative, that she thought him quite obliged by her experienced counsel on his housekeeping and cookery, breaking up his present establishment and letting the house for a year, during which she promised him all facilities for meeting a young widow,

the wealth of whose stockbroking husband would be exactly what his business and estate required, and would pay off all his debts.

Phœbe saw indications on Mervyn's countenance which made it no surprise that he was in such a condition in the morning that only copious loss of blood and the most absolute rest to the last moment enabled him to go to W—— for the trial. Miss Charlecote had undertaken the care of Bertha, that Miss Fennimore might take charge of Maria, who was exceedingly eager to see her brother and sister give evidence.

There is no need to dwell on the proceedings. It was to Phœbe on a larger scale what she had previously gone through. She was too much occupied with the act before God and her neighbour to be self-conscious, or to think of the multitudes eagerly watching her young simple face, or listening to her grave clear tones. A dim perception crossed Lady Bannerman's mind that there really might be something in little Phœbe when she found the sheriff's wife, the *grande dame* of the hunting field, actually shedding tears of emotion.

As soon as Mervyn's own evidence had been given, he had been obliged to go to the inn and lie down ; and Phœbe wished to join him there and go home at once. Both Robert and Sir John Raymond were waiting for her at the door of the witness-box, and the latter begged to introduce the sheriff, who pressed her to let him take her back into court to Lady Bannerman, his wife wished so much to see her there and at luncheon. And when Phœbe declared that she must return to her brother, she was told that it had been settled that she was to come with Sir Nicholas and Lady Bannerman to dine and sleep at the sheriff's next day, after the assize was over, to meet the judges.

Phœbe was almost desperate in her refusals, and was so little believed after all, that she charged Robert—when the sheriff had taken leave—to assure Augusta of the impossibility of her accepting the invitation. Sir John smiled, saying, ‘Lady Caroline scarcely deserved her,

and added, 'Here is another who wishes to shake hands with you, and this time I promise that you shall not be persecuted—my brother.'

He was a thin, spare man, who might have been taken for the elder brother, with a gentle, dreamy expression and soft, tender voice, such as she could not imagine being able to cope with pupils. He asked after her brother's health, and she offered to ascertain whether Mervyn felt well enough to see him, but he thanked her, saying it was better not.

'It could not have been his doing,' thought Phœbe, as she went upstairs. 'How strong-minded Cecily must be! I wonder whether she would have done Bertha good.'

'Whose voice was that?' exclaimed Mervyn, at his door above.

'Sir John Raymond and his brother.'

'Are they coming in?'

'No; they thought it might disturb you,'

Phœbe was glad that these answers fell to the share of the unconscious Robert. Mervyn sat down, and did not revert to the Raymonds through all the homeward journey. Indeed, he seemed unequal to speaking at all, went to his room immediately, and did not appear again when the others came home, bringing tidings that the verdict was guilty, and the sentence penal servitude. Lady Bannerman had further made a positive engagement with the sheriff's lady, and was at first incredulous, then highly displeased, at Phœbe's refusal to be included in it. She was sure it was only that Phœbe was bent on her own way, and thought she should get it when left at home with her guardian and her brothers.

Poor Phœbe, she did not so much as know what her own way was! She had never so much wished for her *wise* guardian, but in the meantime the only wisdom she could see was to wait patiently, and embrace whatever proposal would seem best for the others, though with little hope that any would not entail pain and separa-

tion from those who could spare her as ill as she could spare them.

Dr. Martyn was to come over in the course of the ensuing day to examine Bertha, and give her guardian his opinion of her state. There was little danger of its being favourable to violent changes, for Augusta made a descent on the school-room after dinner, and the morbid agitation thus occasioned obliged Miss Fennimore to sit up with the patient till one o'clock. In the morning the languor was extreme, and the cough so frequent that the fear for the lungs was in the ascendant.

But Augusta, knowing of all this, believed her visit to have been most important, and immediately after breakfast summoned Robert to a conference, that he might be convinced that there must be no delay in taking measures for breaking up the present system.

‘We must hear what Dr. Martyn says.’

‘I never thought anything of Dr. Martyn since he advised me to leave off wine at supper. As Juliana says, a physician can always be taken in by an artful woman, and he is playing into her hands.’

‘Into whose?’ said Robert, unable to suppose it could be Phoebe’s.

‘Come, Robert, you ought not to let yourself be so blinded. I am sure it is more for your interest than my own, but I see you are as simple as ever. Juliana said any one could hoodwink you by talking of altar-cloths and Anglo-Saxons.’

‘Anglo-Catholics, possibly.’

‘Well, it is all the same! It is those nonsensical distinctions, rather than your own interests; but when you are cut out, and depend upon it, she will lose no time in his state of health——’

‘Of whom or what are you talking?’

‘I never thought well of her, pretending to drink nothing but water; and with that short, dry way, that I call impertinence; but I never thought she could be

so lost till last night ! Why, when I thought I would just go and see how the child was—there, after calling himself too ill to come in to dinner, there sat Mervyn, actually drinking tea. I promise you they looked disconcerted !

‘Well they might be ! Bertha suffered half the night from that sudden visit.

‘And you believe that, Robert ! Well ! it is a convenient blind ! But if you wont, we shall do our best to shame them, and if she dares it, we shall never visit her ! That’s all !’

Her drift here becoming revealed to Robert, his uncontrollable smile caused Augusta to swell with resentment. ‘Aye ! nothing on earth will make you own yourself mistaken, or take the advice of your elders, though you might have had enough of upholding Phœbe’s wilfulness.’

‘Well, what do you want me to do ?’

‘To join us all in seeing that Miss Fennimore leaves the house before us. Then I will take the girls to Brighton, and you and the Actons might keep watch over him, and if he should persist in his infatuation—why, in the state of his head, it would almost come to a commission of lunacy. Juliana said so !’

‘I have no doubt of it,’ said Robert, gravely. ‘I am obliged to you both, Augusta. As you observe, I am the party chiefly concerned, therefore I have a right to request that you will leave me to defend my interests as I shall see best, and that you will confide your surmise to no one else.’

Robert was not easily gainsaid when he spoke in that tone, and besides, Augusta really was uncertain whether he did not seriously adopt her advice ; but though silenced towards him, she did not abstain from lamenting herself to Miss Charlecote, who had come by particular request to consult with Dr. Martyn, and enforce his opinion on Mr. Crabbe. Honora settled the question by a laugh, and an assurance that Mervyn had views in another direction ; but Augusta knew of so many abortive schemes for him, and believed him to be

the object of so many reports, that she treated this with disdain, and much amused Honora by her matronly superiority and London patronage.

Dr. Martyn came to luncheon, and she endeavoured to extort from him that indulgence hurt Bertha, and that Mervyn needed variety. Failing in this, she remembered his anti-supper advice, and privately warned Mr. Crabbe against him.

His advice threw a new light on the matter. He thought that in a few weeks' time, Bertha ought to be taken to Switzerland, and perhaps spend the winter in the South of France. Travelling gave the best hope of rousing her spirits or bracing her shattered constitution, but the utmost caution against fatigue and excitement would be requisite ; she needed to be at once humoured and controlled, and her morbid repugnance to new attendants must be respected till it should wear off of its own accord.

Surely this might be contrived between sister, governess, and German nurse, and if Mr. Fulmort himself would go too, it would be the best thing for his health, which needed exemption from business and excitement.

Here was playing into the governess's hands ! Mindful of Juliana's injunctions, Lady Bannerman announced her intention of calling heaven and earth together rather than sanction the impropriety, and set off for her party at the sheriff's in a mood which made Phœbe tremble lest the attractions of ortolans and Burgundy should instigate the 'tremendous sacrifice' of becoming chaperon.

Mervyn thought the doctor's sentence conclusive as to Miss Fennimore's plans, but to his consternation it made no change in them, except that she fixed the departure of the family as the moment of parting. Though her manner towards him had become open and friendly, she was deaf to all that he could urge, declaring that it was her duty to leave his sisters, and that the change, when once made, would be beneficial to Bertha, by removing old associations. In despair, he came to Miss

Charlecote, begging her to try her powers of persuasion for the sake of poor Bertha, now his primary object, whom he treated with spoiling affection. He was quite powerless to withstand any fancy of Bertha in her present state, and not only helpless without Miss Fennimore, but having become so far used to her that for his own sake he could not endure the notion of a substitute. 'Find out the objection,' he said, 'that at least I may know whether to punch Augusta's head.'

Honora gratified him by seeking an interview with the governess, though not clear herself as to the right course, and believing that her advice, had she any to give, would go for very little with the learned governess. Miss Fennimore was soft and sad, but decided, and begging to be spared useless arguments. Whether Lady Bannerman had insulted her by hinting her suspicions, Honor could not divine, for she was firmly entrenched within her previous motive, namely, that it would be wrong to remain in a family where first her system, and then her want of vigilance, had produced such results. And to the representation that for her own sake the present conjuncture was the worst in which she could depart, she replied that it mattered not, since she saw her own deficiencies too plainly ever to undertake again the charge of young ladies, and only intended to find employment as a teacher in a school.

'Say no more,' she entreated; 'and above all do not let Phœbe persuade me,' and there were tears on either cheek.

'Indeed, I believe her not having done so is a most unselfish act of deference to your judgment.'

'I know it for a sign of true affection! You, who know what she is, can guess what it costs me to leave her above all, now that I am one in faith with her, and could talk to her more openly than I ever dared to do; she whose example first showed me that faith is a living substance! Yes, Miss Charlecote, I am to be received into the Church at St. Wulstan's, where I shall be staying, as soon as I have left Beauchamp.'

Overcome with feeling, Honora hastily rose and kissed the governess's forehead, her tears choking her utterance. 'But—but,' she presently said, 'that removes all possible doubt. Does not Robert say so?'

'He does,' said Miss Fennimore; 'but I cannot think so. After having miserably infused my own temper of rationalism, how could I, as a novice and learner, fitly train that poor child? Besides, others of the family justly complain of me, and I *will* not be forced on them. No, nor let my newly-won blessing be alloyed by bringing me any present advantage.'

'I honour you—I agree with you,' said Miss Charlecote, sadly; 'but it makes me the more sorry for those poor girls. I do not see what is to be done! A stranger will be worse than no one to both the invalids; Lieschen has neither head nor nerve; and though I do not believe Phoebe will ever give way, Bertha behaves very ill to her, and the strain of anxiety may be too much for such a mere girl, barely twenty! She may suffer for it afterwards, if not at the time.'

'I feel it all,' sighed Miss Fennimore; 'but it would not justify me in letting myself be thrust on a family whose confidence in me has been deceived. Nobody could go with them but you, Miss Charlecote.'

'Me! how much obliged Mervyn would be,' laughed Honora.

'It was a wild wish, such as crosses the mind in moments of perplexity and distress; but no one else could be so welcome to my poor Bertha, nor be the motherly friend they all require. Forgive me, Miss Charlecote; but I have seen what you made of Phoebe, in spite of me and my system.'

So Honor returned to announce the ill-success of her mission.

'There!' said Mervyn; 'goodness knows what will become of us! Bertha would go into fits at the sight of any stranger; and such a hideous old catamaran as Juliana will be sure to have in pickle, will be the death of her outright. I think Miss Charlecote had better take pity on us!'

‘Oh, Mervyn, impossible!’ cried Phœbe, shocked at his audacity.

‘I protest,’ said Mervyn, ‘nothing else can save you from some nasty, half-bred companion! Faugh! Now, Miss Charlecote would enjoy the trip, put Maria and Bertha to bed, and take you to operas, and pictures, and churches, and you would all be off my hands!’

‘For shame, Mervyn,’ cried Phœbe, crimson at his cavalier manner.

‘It is the second such compliment I have received, Phœbe,’ said Honor. ‘Miss Fennimore does me the honour to tell me to be her substitute.’

‘Then if she says so,’ said Mervyn, ‘it is our only rescue!’

If Honor laughed, it was not that she did not think. As she crossed the park, she felt that each bud of spring beauty, each promised crop, each lamb, each village child, made the proposal the more unwelcome; yet that the sense of being rooted, and hating to move, ought to be combated. It might hardly be treating Humfrey’s ‘goodly heritage’ aright, to make it an excuse for abstaining from an act of love; and since Brooks attended to her so little when at home, he could very well go on without her. Not that she believed that she should be called on to decide. She did not think Mervyn in earnest, nor suppose that he would encumber himself with a companion who could not be set aside like a governess, and was of an age more ‘proper’ and efficient than agreeable. His unceremonious manner proved sufficiently that it was a mere joke, and he would probably laugh his loud, scoffing laugh at the old maid taking him in earnest. Yet she could not rid herself of the thought of Phœbe’s difficulties, and in poor Bertha, she had the keen interest of nurse towards patient.

‘Once before,’ she thought, ‘have I gone out of the beaten track upon impulse. Cruel consequences! Yet do I repent? Not of the act, but of the error that ensued. Then I was eager, young, romantic. Now I would rather abstain: I am old and sluggish. If it is to be,

it will be made plain. I do not distrust my feeling for Phœbe—it is not the jealous, hungering love of old ; and I hope to be able to discern whether this be an act of charity ! At least, I will not take the initiative. I did so last time.’

Honor’s thoughts and speculations were all at Beauchamp throughout the evening and the early morning, till her avocations drove it out of her mind. She was busy, trying hard to get her own way with her bailiff as to the crops, when she was interrupted by tidings that Mr. Fulmort was in the drawing-room ; and concluding it to be Robert, she did not hurry her argument upon guano. On entering the room, however, she was amazed at beholding not Robert, but his brother, cast down in an arm-chair, and looking thoroughly tired out.

‘ Mervyn ! I did not expect to see you ! ’

‘ Yes, I just walked over. I thought I would report progress. I had no notion it was so far.’

And in fact he had not been at the Holt since, as a pert boy, he had found it ‘ slow.’ Honor was rather alarmed at his fatigue, and offered varieties of sustenance, which he declined, returning with eager nervousness to the subject in hand.

The Bannermans, he said, had offered to go with Bertha and Phœbe, but only on condition that Maria was left at a boarding-house, and a responsible governess taken for Bertha. Moreover, Augusta had told Bertha herself what was impending, and the poor child had laid a clinging, trembling grasp on his arm, and hoarsely whispered that if a stranger came to hear her story, she would die. Alas ! it might be easier than before. He had promised never to consent. ‘ But what can I do ? ’ he said, with a hand upon either temple ; ‘ they heed me no more than Maria ! ’

Robert had absolutely half consented to leave his cure in the charge of another, and conduct his brother and sisters, but this plan did not satisfy the guardian, who could not send out his wards without some reliable female.

He swung the tassel of the sofa-cushion violently as he spoke, and looked imploringly at Honora, but she, though much moved, felt obliged to keep her resolution of not beginning.

‘Very hard,’ he said, ‘that when there are but two women in the world that that poor child likes, she can have neither!’ and then, gaining hope from something in her face, he exclaimed, ‘After all, I do believe you will take pity on her!’

‘I thought you in joke yesterday.’

‘I thought it too good to be true! I am not so cool as Phœbe thought me. But really,’ he said, assuming an earnest, rational, gentlemanly manner, ‘you have done so much for us that perhaps it makes us presume, and though I know it is preposterous, yet if it were possible to you to be long enough with poor Bertha to bring her round again, I do believe it would make an infinite difference.’

‘What does Phœbe say?’ asked Honor.

‘Phœbe, poor child, she does not know I am come. She looks as white as death, and got up a smile that was enough to make one cry, but she told me not to mind, for something would be sure to bring it right; and so it will, if you will come.’

‘But, Mervyn, you don’t consider what a nuisance I shall be to you.’

Mervyn looked more gallant than Robert ever could have done, and said something rather foolish; but anxiety quickly made him natural again, and he proceeded, ‘After all, they need not bother you much. Phœbe is of your own sort, and Maria is inoffensive, and Bertha will have Lieschen, and I—I’ll take my own line, and be as little of a bore as I can. You’ll go?’

‘If—if it will do.’

That odd answer was enough. Mervyn, already leaning forward with his arm on his knees, held out one hand, and shaded his eyes with the other, as, half with a sob, he said, ‘There, then, it is all right! Miss Charlecote, you can’t guess what it is to a man not to be trusted with his own sisters!’

These words made that *bête noire*, John Mervyn Fulmort, nearly as much a child of her own as his brother and sister; for they were in a tone of self-blame—not of resentment.

She was sufficiently afraid of him to respect his reserve; moreover, he looked so ill and harassed that she dreaded his having an attack, and heartily wished for Phœbe, so she only begged him to rest till after her early dinner, when she would convey him back to Beauchamp; and then left him alone, while she went to look her undertaking in the face, rather amused to find herself his last resource, and surprised to find her spirit of enterprise rising, her memories of Alps, lakes, cathedrals, and pictures fast assuming the old charm that had erst made her long to see them again. And with Phœbe! Really it would be almost a disappointment if the scheme failed.

When she again met her unwonted guest he plunged into plans, routes, and couriers, treating her as far more completely pledged than she chose to allow; and eating as heartily as he dared, and more so than she thought Phœbe would approve. She was glad to have him safe at his own door, where Phœbe ran to meet them, greatly relieved, for she had been much disturbed by his absence at luncheon.

‘Miss Charlecote! Did you meet him?’

‘I went after her’—and Mervyn boyishly caught his sister round the waist, and pushed her down into a curtsy—‘make your obedience; she is going to look after you all.’

‘Going with us!’ cried Phœbe, with clasped hands.

‘To see about it,’ began Honor, but the words were strangled in a transported embrace.

‘Dearest, dearest Miss Charlecote! Oh, I knew it would all come right if we were patient; but, oh! that it should be so right! Oh! Mervyn, how could you?’

‘Ah! you see what it is not to be faint-hearted.’ And Phœbe, whose fault was certainly not a faint heart, laughed at this poor jest, as she had seldom

laughed before, with an *abandon* of gaiety and joyousness. The quiet girl was absolutely thrown off her balance, laughed and cried, thanked and exclaimed, moved restlessly, and spoke incoherently.

‘Oh ! may I tell Bertha ?’ she asked.

‘No, I’ll do that,’ said Mervyn. ‘It is all my doing.’

‘Run after him, Phœbe,’ said Honor. ‘Don’t let Bertha think it settled !’

And Bertha was, of course, disappointingly indifferent.

Lady Bannerman’s nature was not capable of great surprise, but Miss Charlecote’s proposal was not unwelcome. ‘I did not want to go,’ she said ; ‘though dear Sir Nicholas would have made any sacrifice, and it would have looked so for them to have gone alone. Travelling with an invalid is so trying, and Phœbe made such a rout about Maria, that Mr. Crabbe insisted on her going. But you like the kind of thing.’

Honor undertook for her own taste for the kind of thing, and her ladyship continued, ‘Yes, you must find it uncommonly dull to be so much alone. Where did Juliana tell me she had heard of Lucy Sandbrook ?’

‘She is in Staffordshire,’ answered Honor, gravely.

‘Ah, yes, with Mrs. Willis Beaumont ; I remember. Juliana made a point of letting her know all about it, and how you were obliged to give her up.’

‘I hope not,’ exclaimed Honor, alarmed. ‘I never gave her up ! There is no cause but her own spirit of independence that she should not return to me to-morrow.’

‘Oh, indeed,’ said Augusta, carelessly letting the subject drop, after having implanted anxiety too painful to be quelled by the hope that Lady Acton’s neighbourhood might have learnt how to rate her words.

Mr. Crabbe was satisfied and complimentary ; Robert, rejoiced and grateful ; and Bertha, for the first time, set her will upon recovering, and made daily

experiments on her strength, thus quickly amending, though still her weakness and petulance needed the tenderest management, and once when a doubt arose as to Miss Charlecote's being able to leave home, she suddenly withered up again, with such a recurrence of unfavourable symptoms as proved how precarious was her state.

It was this evidence of the necessity of the arrangement that chiefly contributed to bring it to pass. When the pressure of difficulty lessened, Mervyn was half ashamed of his own conquest, disliked the obligation, and expected to be bored by 'the old girl,' as, to Phœbe's intense disgust, he *would* speak of Miss Charlecote. Still, in essentials he was civil and considerate, and Honor carefully made it evident that she did not mean to obtrude herself, and expected him to sit loose to the female part of the company. Divining that he would prefer the start from home not to be simultaneous, and also favouring poor Bertha's shuddering horror of the direct line of railway to London, she proposed that the ladies should work their way by easy journeys on cross lines to Southampton, whilst Mervyn settled his affairs at the office, and then should come to them with Robert, who had made it possible to take an Easter holiday in which to see them safe to their destination in Switzerland.

Phoebe tried to acquiesce in Miss Charlecote's advice to trust Mervyn's head to Robert's charge, and not tease him with solicitude; but the being debarred from going to London was a great disappointment. She longed for a sight of St. Matthew's; and what would it not have been to see the two brothers there like brothers indeed? But she must be content with knowing that so it was. Mervyn's opposition was entirely withdrawn, and though he did not in the least comprehend and was far from admiring his brother's aims, still his name and his means were no longer withheld from supporting Robert's purposes, 'because he was such a good fellow, it was a shame to stand in his way.' She

knew, too, rather by implication than confession, that Mervyn imagined his chief regrets for the enormous extravagance of the former year, were because he had thus deprived himself of the power of buying a living for his brother, as compensation for having kept him out of his father's will. Whether Mervyn would ever have made the purchase, and still more whether Robert would have accepted it, was highly doubtful, but the intention was a step for which to be thankful; and Phœbe watched the growing friendliness of the long estranged pair with constantly new delight, and anticipated much from Mervyn's sight of St. Matthew's with eyes no longer jaundiced.

She would gladly, too, have delayed the parting with Miss Fennimore, who had made all her arrangements for a short stay with her relatives in London, and then for giving lessons at a school. To Phœbe's loyal spirit, it seemed hard that even Miss Charlecote's care should be regarded as compensating for the loss of the home friend of the last seven years, and the closer, dearer link was made known as she sat late over the fire with the governess on Easter Sunday evening, their last at Beauchamp. Silent hitherto, Miss Fennimore held her peace no longer, but begged Phœbe to think of one who on another Sunday would no longer turn aside from the Altar. Phœbe lifted her eyes, full of hope and inquiry, and as she understood, exclaimed, 'O, I am glad! I knew you must have some deep earnest reason for not being with us.'

'You never guessed?'

'I never tried. I saw that Robert knew, so I hoped.'

'And prayed?'

'Yes, you belonged to me.'

'Do I belong to you now?'

'Nay, more than ever now.'

'Then, my child, you never traced my unsettled faith?—my habit of testing mystery by reason never perplexed you?'

Phœbe thought a moment, and said, 'I knew that Robert distrusted, though I never asked why. There was a time when I used to try to sift the evidence and logic of all I learnt, and I was puzzled where faith's province began and reasoning ended. But when our first sorrow came, all the puzzles melted, and it was not worth while to argue on realities that I felt. Since that, I have read more, and seen where my own ignorance made my difficulties, and I have prized—yes, adored, the truths all the more because you had taught me to appreciate in some degree their perfect foundation on reasoning.'

'Strange,' said Miss Fennimore, 'that we should have lived together so long, acting on each other, yet each unconscious of the other's thoughts. I see now. What to you was not doubt, but desire for a reason for your hope, became in poor Bertha, not disbelief, but contempt and carelessness of what she did not feel. I shall never have a sense of rest, till you can tell me that she enters into your faith. I am chiefly reconciled to leaving her, because I trust that in her enfeebled, dependent state, she may become influenced by Miss Charlecote and by you.'

'I cannot argue with her,' said Phœbe. 'When she is well, she can always puzzle me; I lose her when she gets to her *ego*. You are the only one who can cope with that.'

'The very reason for keeping away. Don't argue. Live and act. That was your lesson to me.'

Phœbe did not perceive, and Miss Fennimore loved her freedom from self-consciousness too well even for gratitude's sake to molest her belief that the conversion was solely owing to Robert's powers of controversy.


That one fleeting glimpse of inner life was the true farewell. The actual parting was a practical matter of hurry of trains, and separation of parcels, with Maria too busy with the Maltese dog to shed tears, or even to perceive that this was a final leavetaking with one of those whom she best loved.



CHAPTER XI.

Tak down, tak down the mast of gowd,
Set up the mast of tree,
It sets not a forsaken lady
To sail so gallantly.

Annie of Lochroyan.

‘UAIN'T little white-capped objects !
The St. Wulstan's girls marching to St.
Paul's ! Ah ! the banner I helped to
work ! How well I remember the
contriving that crozier upon it ! How
well it has worn ! Sweet Honey must
be in London ; it was the sight she most grudged miss-
ing !’

So thought Lucilla Sandbrook as a cab conveyed her
through the Whittingtonian intricacies.

Her residence with Mrs. Willis Beaumont was not
a passage in her life on which she loved to dwell.
Neither party had been well content with the other,
though deference to Mrs. Prendergast had held them
together. The lady herself was worthy and kind-hearted,
but dull and tedious ; and Lucilla, used to animation
and intellect, had wearied excessively of the platitudes
which were meant as friendly conversation, while her
keen remarks and power of drollery and repartee were
just sufficiently perceived to be dreaded and disliked.
The children were like their mother, and were fright-
ened and distressed by her quickness and unreasonable
expectations. Their meek, demure heaviness and com-
placency, even at their sports, made her positively dis-

like them, all but one scapegrace boy, in favour with no one, and whom she liked more from perverseness and compassion than from any merits of his own. Lady Acton's good offices gave the widow a tangible cause, such as was an absolute satisfaction, for her antipathy, and shook the implicit trust in Mrs. Prendergast's recommendation that had hitherto overridden her private sentiments; yet still, habitual awe of her sister-in-law, and her own easiness and dread of change, left things in the same state until a crisis caused by a grand disturbance among the children. In the nice matter of meting out blame, mamma's partiality and the children's ungenerosity left an undue share upon the scapegrace; his indignant partisan fought his battles 'not wisely but too well,' lost temper, and uttered sarcastic home truths which startled and stung the lady into the request for which she could hardly have nerved herself in cooler moments, namely, that they might part.

This settled, each secretly felt that there was something to be regretted, and both equally wished that a new engagement should be made before the termination of the present should be made known at Southminster. For this purpose, every facility had been given for Miss Sandbrook's coming to town personally to answer two ladies to whom she had been mentioned. A family in the neighbourhood had already been tried, but had declined her, and Mrs. Beaumont had shown her the note; 'so stylish, such strange stories afloat.' Lucilla felt it best to break upon new ground, and wounded and depressed, had yet resentment enough to bear her through boldly. She wished to inspect Owen's child, and wrote to ask Mrs. Murrell to give her a bed for a couple of nights, venturing on this measure because, in the old woman's monthly report, she had mentioned that Mr. Fulmort had gone abroad for a fortnight.

It had not been an exhilarating evening. Small children were not much to Lucilla's taste, and her nephew was not a flattering specimen. He had the

whitened drawn-up appearance of a child who had spent most of his life in a London cellar, with a pinched little visage and preternatural-looking black eyes, a squeaky little fretful voice, and all the language he had yet acquired decidedly cockney. Moreover, he had the habits of a spoilt child, and that a vulgar one, and his grandmother expected his aunt to think him a prodigy. There was a vacant room where Lucilla passed as much of her time as she could without an assumption of superiority, but she was obliged to spend the evening in the small furniture-encumbered parlour, and hear by turns of her nephew's traits of genius, of the merits of the preachers in Cat-alley, and the histories of the lodgers. The motherly Mrs. Murrell had invited any of the young men whose 'hearts might be touched' to attend her 'simple family worship;' and to Lucilla's discomfiture and her triumph, a youth appeared in the evening, and the young lady had her doubts whether the expounding were the attraction.

It was a relief to quit the close, underground atmosphere even for a cab; and 'an inspecting lady must be better than that old woman,' thought poor Lucy, as, heartily weary of Mrs. Murrell's tongue and her own graciousness, she rattled through the streets. Those long ranks of charity children renewed many an association of old. The festival which had been the annual event of Honor Charlecote's youth, she had made the same to her children, and Cilla had not despised it till recently. Thoughts of better days, of home-feelings, of tenderness, began to soften her. She had spent nearly two years without the touch of a kindred hand, and for many months past had been learning what it was to be looked at by no loving eye. She was on her way to still greater strangers! No wonder her heart yearned to the gentle voice that she had once spurned, and well-nigh in spite of herself, she muttered,

'Really I do think a kiss of poor Honor's would do me good! I have a great mind to go to her when I

come back from Kensington. If I have taken a situation she cannot suppose that I want anything from her. It would be very comfortable ; I should hear of Owen ! I will go ! Even if she be not in town, I could talk to Mrs. Jones, and sit a quarter of an hour in the cedar room ! It would be like meeting Owen ; it would be rest and home !

She felt quite happy and pleased with herself under this resolution, but it was late before she could put it in practice. The lady at Kensington rather started on entering the room where she had been waiting nearly an hour. 'I thought—' she said, apologetically, 'Did my servant say Miss Sandbrook ?'

Lucilla assented, and the lady, a little discomposed, asked a few questions, furtively surveying her all the time, seemed confused, then begged her to take some luncheon. It was so long since Mrs. Murrell's not very tempting breakfast, that the invitation was welcome, even though the presence of a gentleman and an elderly lady showed that it was a pretext for a family inspection, and again she detected the same start of surprise, and a glance passing round the circle, such as made her glad when afterwards an excuse was made for leaving her alone, that she might apply to the glass to see whether anything were amiss in her dress.

Then first she remarked that hers was not the governess air. She had long felt very virtuous for having spent almost nothing on her clothes, eking out her former wardrobe to the utmost ; and the loose, dove-coloured jacket over her black silk skirt betrayed Parisian make, as did the exquisite rose, once worn in her hair, and now enlivening the white ribbon and black lace of the cheap straw bonnet, far back upon the rippling hair turned back from her temples, and falling in profuse ringlets. It was her ordinary, unpremeditated appearance, but she perceived that to these good people it was startlingly stylish, and she was prepared for the confused intimation that there was no need for entering upon the discussion of terms.

She had been detained too late to make her other call, and the processions of tired children showed her that the service at St. Paul's was over. The depression of disappointment inclined her the more to the loving old face, and she caused herself to be set down at the end of Woolstone Lane, feeling as if drawn by a magnet as she passed the well-known warehouse walls, and as if it were home indeed when she reached the court door.

It would not yield to her intimate manipulation of the old latch—a bad sign, and the bell re-echoed in vacancy. Again and again she rang, each moment of exclusion awakening a fresh yearning towards the cedar fragrance, every stare of passer-by making her long for the safe shelter of the bay-windowed parlour. At last a step approached, and a greeting for the friendly old servant was on her tongue's end. Alas! a strange face met her eye, elderly, respectable, but guarded. Miss Charlecote was not at home, not in town, not at Hiltonbury—gone abroad, whither was not known. Mrs. Jones? Dead more than a year ago. Every reply was followed by an attempt to close the door, and it needed all Lucy's native hardihood, all her ardent craving for her former home, to venture on an entreaty to be admitted for a few minutes. She was answered, that the house might be shown to no one without orders from Mr. Parsons.

Her heart absolutely fainted within her, as the heavy door was closed on her, making her thoroughly realize her voluntary renunciation of home and protection, and the dreariness of the world on which she had cast herself. Anxiety on Honor's behalf began to awaken. Nothing but illness could have induced her to leave her beloved Holt, and in the thought of her sick, lonely, and untended by the children she had fostered, Cilla forgave her adoption, forgave her forgiveness, forgave everything, in the impulse to hasten to her to requite the obligation by the tenderest care.

She had actually set off to the parsonage in quest of

intelligence, when she recollected that she might appear there as a discarded governess in quest of her offended patroness; and her pride impelled her to turn back, but she despatched Mrs. Murrell's little maid with a note, saying that, being in town for a day, and hearing of Miss Charlecote's absence on the continent, she could not help begging to be certified that illness was not the cause. The reply was brief and formal, and it only altered Lucilla's uneasiness, for Mrs. Parsons merely assured her of Miss Charlecote's perfect health, and said she was gone abroad with the Fulmort family, where there had been a good deal of illness.

In her displeasure and desire to guard Honora from becoming a prey to the unworthy Sandbrooks, Mrs. Parsons never guessed at the cruelty of her own words, and at the conclusion drawn from them. Robert Fulmort likewise absent! No doubt his health had broken down, and Honor was taking Phœbe to be with him! She examined Mrs. Murrell, and heard of his activity, indeed, but of his recent absences from his parish, and by and by the good woman bethought her of a report that Mr. Fulmort was from home on account of his health. Oh, the misery of not daring to make direct inquiry!

But the hard practical world was before her, and the new situation was no longer a matter of wilful choice, but of dire necessity. She would not be hastily thrust from her present post, and would be lovingly received at Southminster in case of need, but she had no dependence save on her own exertions, and perverse romance had died away into desolateness. With strange, desperate vehemence, and determination not again to fail, she bought the plainest of cap-fronts, reduced her bonnet to the severest dowdiness, hid, straightened, tightened the waving pale gold of her hair, folded her travelling shawl old-womanishly, cast aside all the merely ornamental, and glancing at herself, muttered, 'I did not know I could be so insignificant!' Little Owen stared as if his beautiful aunt had lost her identity, and Mrs.

Murrell was ready to embrace her as a convert to last night's exposition.

Perhaps the trouble was wasted, for the lady, Mrs. Bostock, did not seem to be particular. She was quite young, easily satisfied, and only eager to be rid of an embarrassing interview of a kind new to her; the terms were fixed, and before many weeks had passed Lucilla was settled at a cottage of gentility, in sight of her Thames, but on the Essex side, where he was not the same river to her, and she found herself as often thinking that those tainted waters had passed the garden in Woolstone Lane as that they had sparkled under Wrapworth Bridge.

It was the greatest change she had yet undergone. She was entirely the governess, never the companion of the elders. Her employers were mercantile, wrapped up in each other, busy, and gay. The husband was all day in London, and, when the evenings were not given to society, preferred spending them alone with his wife and children. In his absence, the nursery absorbed nearly all the time the mother could spare from her company and her household. The children, who were too old for playthings, were consigned to the first-rate governess, and only appeared in the evening. Lucilla never left her schoolroom but for a walk, or on a formal request to appear in the drawing-room at a party; a solitude which she at first thought preferable to Mrs. Willis Beaumont's continual small chatter, especially as the children were pleasant, brisk, and loveable, having been well broken in by their Swiss *bonne*.

Necessity had trained Cilly in self-restraint, and the want of surveillance made her generous nature the more scrupulous in her treatment of her pupils; she taught them diligently, kept good order, won their affection and gave them some of her own, but nothing could obviate her growing weariness of holding intercourse with no mind above eleven years old. Trouble and anxiety she had known before, and even the terrible heartache that she carried about with her

might have failed to wear down a being constituted as she was, without the long solitary evenings, and the total want of companionship. The first shock had been borne by the help of bustle and change, and it was only as weeks passed on, that care and depression grew upon her. Lessons, walks, children's games were oppressive in turn, and though the last good-night was a welcome sound, yet the solitude that ensued was unspeakably forlorn. Reading she had never loved, even had this been a house of books; the children were too young to need exertion on her part to keep in advance of them, and their routine lessons wore out her energies too much for her to turn to her own resources. She did little but repair her wardrobe, work for the boy in Whittington-street, and let thoughts drift through her mind. That death-bed scene at Hyères, which had so often risen unbidden to her mind as she lay on her crib, was revived again, but it was not her father whose ebbing life she watched. It was one for whom she durst not ask, save by an inquiry from her brother, who had never dropped his correspondence with Honora; but Owen was actively employed, and his locality and habits were so uncertain that his letters were often astray for long together. His third year of apprenticeship had begun, and Lucilla's sole hope of a change from her present dreary captivity was in his either returning with Mr. Currie, or finding employment and sending for her and his child to Canada. 'By that time,' she thought, 'Europe will contain nothing to me. Nay, what does it contain that I have a right to care for now? I don't delude myself. I know his look and manner. His last thought will be for his flock at St. Matthew's, not for her who drove him to the work that has been killing him. Oh, no, he won't even forgive me, for he will think it the greatest service I could have done him.' Her eyes were hot and dry; what a relief would tears have been!



CHAPTER XII.

Enid, my early and my only love,
I thought, but that your father came between,
In former days you saw me favourably,
And if it were so, do not keep it back,
Make me a little happier, let me know it.

TENNYSON.



THE foreign tour proved a great success. The summer in the Alps was delightful. The complete change gave Bertha new life, bodily strength first returning, and then mental activity. The glacier system was a happy exchange for her *ego*, and she observed and enjoyed with all the force of her acute intelligence and spirit of inquiry, while Phœbe was happy in doing her duty by profiting by all opportunities of observation, in taking care of Maria and listening to Mervyn, and Miss Charlecote enjoyed scenery, poetry, art, and natural objects with relish keener than even that of her young friends, who were less impressible to beauty in every shape.

Mervyn behaved very well to her, knowing himself bound to make the journey agreeable to her; he was constantly kind to Bertha, and in the pleasure of her revival submitted to a wonderful amount of history and science. All his grumbling was reserved for the private ear of Phœbe, whose privilege it always was to be his murmuring block, and who was only too thankful to keep to herself his discontents whenever his route was not chosen (and often when it was), his disgusts with inns, railroads, and sights, and his impatience of

all pursuits save Bertha's. Many a time she was permitted to see and hear nothing but how much he was bored, but on the whole the growls were so mitigated compared with what she had known, that it was almost contentment; and that he did not absolutely dislike their habits was plain from his adherence to the ladies, though he might have been quite independent of them.

Bertha's distortion of eye and hesitation of speech, though much modified, always recurred from fatigue, excitement, or meeting with strangers, or—still worse—with acquaintance. The difficulty of utterance distressed her far more than if she had been subject thereto from infancy, and increased her exceeding repugnance to any sort of society beyond her own party. The question whether she were fit to return home for the winter was under debate, when at Geneva, early in September, tidings reached the travellers that produced such a shock as to settle the point.

Juliana Acton was dead! It had been a very short attack of actual illness, but disease had long been secretly preying on her—and her asperity of disposition might be accounted for by constant unavowed suffering. It was a great blow. Her unpleasant qualities were all forgiven in the dismay of learning what their excuse had been; for those who have so lived as to make themselves least missed, are perhaps at the first moment the more mourned by good hearts for that very cause.

Augusta was so much terrified on her own account, that she might almost have been made a hydropathist on the spot; and Robert wrote that poor Sir Bevil was perfectly overwhelmed with grief and self-reproach, giving himself no credit for his exemplary patience and forbearance, but bitterly accusing himself of hardness and neglect. These feelings were shared in some degree by all the others, and Mervyn was especially affected. There had been much to soften him since his parents' death, and the sudden loss of the

sister with whom he had always been on terms of scorn and dislike, shocked him excessively, and drew him closer to the survivors, sobering him, and silencing his murmurs for the time in real grief and awe. Bertha likewise was thoroughly overcome, not so much by these feelings, as by the mere effect of the sudden tidings on her nervous temperament, and the overclouding of the cheerfulness that had hitherto surrounded her. This, added to a day of over-fatigue and exposure, brought back such a recurrence of unfavourable symptoms, that a return to an English winter was not to be thought of. The south of France was decided upon at once, and as Lucilla had truly divined, Honor Charlecote's impulse led them to Hyères, that she might cast at least one look at the grave in the Stranger's corner of the cypress-grown burial-ground, where rested the beloved of her early days, the father of the darlings of her widowed heart—loved and lost.

She endured her absence from home far better than she had expected, so much easier was it to stay away than to set off, and so completely was she bound up with her companions, loving Phœbe like a parent, and the other two like a nurse, and really liking the brother. All took delight in the winter paradise of Hyères, that fragment of the East set down upon the French coast, and periodically peopled with a motley multitude of visitors from all the lands of Europe, all invalids, or else attendants on invalids.

Bertha still shrank from all contact with society, and the ladies, for her sake, lived entirely apart ; but Mervyn made acquaintance, and sometimes went out on short expeditions with other gentlemen, or to visit his mercantile correspondents at Marseilles, or other places on the coast.

It was while he was thus absent that the three sisters stood one afternoon on the paved terrace of the *Hotel des Isles d'Or*, which rose behind them, in light coloured stone, of a kind of Italian-looking architecture, commanding a lovely prospect, the mountains

on the Toulon side, though near, melting into vivid blue, and white cloud wreaths hanging on their slopes. In front lay the plain, covered with the peculiar grey-tinted olive foliage, overtopped by date palms, and sloping up into rounded hills covered with dark pines, the nearest to the sea bearing on its crest the Church *de l'Ermitage*. The sea itself was visible beyond the olives, bordered by a line of *étangs* or pools, and white heaps of salt, and broken by a peninsula and the three Isles d'Or. It was a view of which Bertha seemed never able to have enough, and she was always to be found gazing at it when the first ready for a walk.

‘What, are you going to sketch, Phœbe?’ she said, as the sisters joined her. ‘How can you, on such a day as this, with the air, as it were, loaded with cheiranthus smell? It makes one lazy to think of it!’

‘It seems to be a duty to preserve some remembrance of this beautiful place.’

‘It may be a pity to miss it, but as for the duty!’

‘What, not to give pleasure at home, and profit by opportunities?’

‘It is too hard to carry about an embodiment of Miss Fennimore’s rules! Why, have you no individuality, Phœbe?’

‘Must I not sketch, then?’ said Phœbe, smiling.

‘You are very welcome, if you would do it for your pleasure, not as an act of bondage.’

‘Not as bondage,’ said Phœbe; ‘it is only because I ought that I care to do so at all.’

‘And that’s the reason you only make maps of the landscape.’

It was quite true that Phœbe had no accomplished turn, and what had been taught her she only practised as a duty to the care and cost expended on it, and these were things where ‘all her might’ was no equivalent for a spark of talent. ‘Ought’ alone gave her the zest that Bertha would still have found in ‘ought not.’

‘It is all I can do,’ she said, ‘and Miss Fennimore

may like to see them ; so, Bertha, I shall continue to carry the sketch-book by which the English woman is known like the man by his "Murray." Miss Charlecote has letters to write, so we must go out by ourselves.'

The Provençal natives of Hyères had little liking for the foreigners who thronged their town, but did not molest them, and ladies walked about freely in the lovely neighbourhood, so that Honor had no scruple in sending out her charges, unaccompanied except by Lieschen, in case the two others might wish to dispose of Maria, while they engaged in some pursuit beyond her powers.

Poor Lieschen, a plump Prussian, grown portly on Beauchamp good living, had little sympathy with the mountain tastes of her frauleins, and would have wished all Hyères like the shelf on the side of the hill where stood their hotel, whence the party set forth to the Place des Palmiers, so called from six actual palms bearing, but not often ripening dates. Two sides were enclosed by houses, on a third an orange garden sloped down the descent ; the fourth, where the old town climbed straight up the hill, was regarded by poor Lieschen with dread, and she vainly persuaded Maria at least to content herself with joining the collection of natives resting on the benches beneath the palms. How willingly would the good German have produced her knitting, and sought a compatriot among the nurses who sat gossiping and embroidering, while Maria might have played among their charges, who were shovelling about, or pelting each other with the tiny white sea-washed pebbles that thickly strewn the place.

But Maria, with the little Maltese dog in her arms, to guard him from a hailstorm of the pebbles, was inexorably bent on following her sisters, and Bertha had hurried nervously across from the strangers, so that Lieschen must pursue those light steps through the winding staircase streets, sometimes consisting of broad shallow steps, sometimes of actual flights of steep stairs

hewn out in the rock, leading to a length of level terrace, where, through garden gates, orange trees looked out, dividing the vantage ground with houses and rocks—up farther, past the almost desolate old church of St. Paul—farther again—till, beyond all the houses, they came forth on the open mountain-side, with a crest of rock far above, surmounted by the ruins of a castle, said to have been fortified by the Saracens, and taken from them by Charles Martel. It was to this castle that Phœbe's sketching duty was to be paid, and Maria and Bertha expressed their determination of climbing up to it, in hopes, as the latter said, of finding Charles Martel's original hammer. Lieschen, puffing and panting already, looked horrified, and laughingly they bade her sit down and knit, whilst they set out on their adventure. Phœbe smiled as she looked up, and uttered a prognostic that made Bertha the more defiant, exhilarated as she was by the delicious compound of sea and mountain breeze, and by the exquisite view, the roofs of the town sloping rapidly down, and the hills stretching round, clothed in pine woods, into which the grey olivettes came stealing up, while beyond lay the sea, intensely blue, and bearing on its bosom the three Isles d'Or, flushed with radiant colour.

The sisters bravely set themselves to scramble among the rocks, each surface turned to the sea breeze exquisitely and fantastically tinted by coloured lichens, and all interspersed with the classical acanthus' noble leaves, the juniper, and the wormwood. On they went, winding upwards as Bertha hoped, but also sideways, and their circuit had lasted a weary while, and made them exhausted and breathless, when looking round for their bearings, they found themselves in an enchanted maze of grey rocks, half hidden in myrtle, beset by the bristly battledores of prickly pear, and shaded by cork trees. Above was the castle, perched up, and apparently as high above them as when they began their enterprise; below was a steep descent, clothed with pines and adorned with white heaths. The place was

altogether strange ; they had lost themselves ; Bertha began to repent of her adventure, and Maria was much disposed to cry.

‘Never mind, Maria,’ said Bertha, ‘we will not try to go any higher. See, here is the dry bed of a torrent that will make a famous path down. There, that’s right. What a picture it is ! what an exquisite peep of the sea between the boughs ! What now, what frightens you ?’

‘The old woman, she looks so horrid.’

‘The witch for the lost children ? No, no, Maria, she is only gathering fir-cones, and completing the picture in her red *basquine*, brown jacket, and great hat. I would ask her the way, but that we could not understand her Provençal.’

‘Oh, dear ! I wish Phœbe was here ! I wish we were safe !’

‘If I ever come mountain-climbing again with you at my heels ! Take care, there’s no danger if you mind your feet, and we must come out somewhere.’

The somewhere, when the slope became less violent, was among vineyards and olivettes, no vestige of a path through them, only a very small cottage, picturesque among the rocks, whence proceeded the sounds of a *cornet-à-piston*. As Bertha stood considering which way to take, a dog flew out of the house and began barking. This brought out a man, who rudely shouted to the terrified pair that they were trespassing. They would have fled at once up the torrent-bed, bad as it was for ascent, but there was a derisive exclamation and laugh, and half-a-dozen men, half-tipsy, came pouring out of the cottage, bawling to Colibri, the rough, shaggy white dog, that seemed disposed to spring at the Maltese in Bertha’s arms.

The foremost, shouting in French to the sisters to stop, pointed to what he called the way, and Bertha drew Maria in that direction, trusting that they should escape by submission, but after going a little distance, she found herself at the edge of a bare, deep, dry

ravine, steep on each side, almost so as to be impassable. The path only ran on the other side. There was another shout of exultation and laughter at the English girls' consternation. At this evident trick of the surly peasants, Maria shook all over, and burst into tears, and Bertha, gathering courage, turned to expostulate and offer a reward, but her horrible stammer coming on worse than ever, produced nothing but inarticulate sounds.

'Monsieur, there is surely some mistake,' said a clear voice in good French from the path on the other side, and looking across, the sisters were cheered by an unmistakeable English brown hat. The peasants drew back a little, believing that the young ladies were not so unprotected as they had supposed, and the first speaker, with something like apology, declared that this was really the path, and descending where the sides were least steep, held out his hand to help Bertha. The lady, whose bank was more practicable, came down to meet them, saying in French, with much emphasis, that she would summon 'those gentlemen' to their assistance if desired; words that had considerable effect upon the enemy.

Poor Maria was in such terror that she could hardly keep her footing, and the hands both of Bertha and the unknown friend were needed to keep her from affording still more diversion to the peasants by falling prostrate. The lady seemed intuitively to understand what was best for both, and between them they contrived to hush her sobs, and repress her inclination to scream for Phœbe, and thus to lead her on, each holding a hand till they were at a safe distance; and Bertha, whose terror had been far greater than at the robbery at home, felt that she could let herself speak, when she quivered out an agony of trembling thanks. 'I am glad you are safe from these vile men,' said the lady, kindly, 'though they could hardly have done anything really to hurt you.'

'Frenchmen should not laugh at English girls,'

cried Bertha. 'Oh, I wish my brothers were here,' and she turned round with a fierce gesture.

'Phœbe, Phœbe ; I want Phœbe and Lieschen !' was Maria's cry.

'Can I help you to find your party?' was the next question ; and the voice had a gentle, winning tone that reassured Maria, who clung tight to her hand, exclaiming, 'Don't go away ;' and though for months past the bare proposal of encountering a stranger would have made Bertha almost speechless, she felt a soothing influence that enabled her to reply with scarcely a hesitation. On comparing notes, it was discovered that the girls had wandered so far away from their sister that they could only rejoin her by re-entering the town and mounting again ; and their new friend, seeing how nervous and agitated both still were, offered to escort them, only giving notice to her own party what had become of her.

She had come up with some sketching acquaintance, and not drawing herself, had, like the sisters, been exploring among the rocks, when she had suddenly come on them in the distress which had so much shaken them, that, reluctant to lose sight of their guardian, they accompanied her till she saw one of her friends, and then waited while she ran down with the announcement. 'How ridiculous it is in me,' muttered Bertha to herself, discontentedly ; 'she will think us wild creatures. I wish we were not both so tall.'

And embarrassment, together with the desire to explain, deprived her so entirely of utterance, that Maria volunteered, 'Bertha always speaks so funnily since she was ill.' Rather a perplexing speech for the lady to hear ; but instead of replying, she asked which was their hotel ; and Bertha answering, she turned with a start of surprise and interest, as if to see their faces better, adding, 'I have not seen you at the *table d'hôte* ;' and under the strange influence of her voice and face, Bertha was able to answer, 'No. As Maria says, I have been very silly since my illness in the winter,

and—and they have given way to me, and let me see no one.’

‘But we shall see *you* ; you are in our hotel,’ cried Maria. ‘Do come and let me show you all my Swiss costumes.’

‘Thank you ; if——’ and she paused, perhaps a little perplexed by Maria ; and Bertha added, in the most womanly voice that she could muster, ‘My sister and Miss Charlecote will be very glad to see you—very much obliged to you.’

Then Maria, who was unusually demonstrative, put another question—

‘Are you ill ? Bertha says everybody here is ill. I hope you are not.’

‘No, thank you,’ was the reply. ‘I am here with my uncle and aunt. It is my uncle who has been unwell.’

Bertha, afraid that Maria might blunder into a history of her malady, began to talk fast of the landscape and its beauties. The stranger seemed to understand her desire to lead away from herself, and readily responded, with a manner that gave sweetness to all she said. She was not very young-looking, and Maria’s notion might be justified that she was at Hyères on her own account, for there was hardly a tint of colour on her cheek ; she was exceedingly spare and slender, and there was a wasted, worn look about the lower part of her face, and something subdued in her expression, as if some great, lasting sorrow had passed over her. Her eyes were large, brown, soft, and full of the same tender, pensive kindness as her voice and smile ; and perhaps it was this air of patient suffering that above all attracted Bertha, in the soreness of her wounded spirit, just as the affectionateness gained Maria, with the instinct of a child.

However it might be, Phœbe, who had become uneasy at their absence, and only did not go to seek them from the conviction that nothing would set them so completely astray as not finding her at her post, was

exceedingly amazed to be hailed by them from beneath instead of above, and to see them so amicably accompanied by a stranger. Maria went on in advance to greet the newly-recovered sister, and tell their adventure ; and Bertha, as she saw Phœbe's pretty, grateful, self-possessed greeting, rejoiced that their friend should see that one of the three, at least, knew what to say, and could say it. As they all crept down together through the rugged streets, Phœbe felt the same strange attraction as her sisters, accompanied by a puzzling idea that she had seen the young lady before, or some one very like her. Phœbe was famous for seeing likenesses ; and never forgetting a face that she had once seen, her recognitions were rather a proverb in the family ; and she felt her credit almost at stake in making out the countenance before her ; but it was all in vain, and she was obliged to resign herself to discuss the Pyrenees, where it appeared that their new friend had been spending the summer.

At the inn-door they parted, she going along a corridor to her aunt's rooms, and the three Fulmorts hurrying simultaneously to Miss Charlecote to narrate their adventure. She was as eager as they to know the name of their rescuer, and to go to thank her ; and ringing for the courier, sent him to make inquiries. 'Major and Mrs. Holmby, and their niece,' was the result ; and the next measure was Miss Charlecote's setting forth to call on them in their apartments, and all the three young ladies wishing to accompany her—even Bertha ! What could this encounter have done to her ? Phœbe withdrew her claim at once, and persuaded Maria to remain, with the promise that her new friend should be invited to enjoy the exhibition of the book of Swiss costumes ; and very soon she was admiring them, after having received an explanation sufficient to show her how to deal with Maria's peculiarities. Mrs. Holmby, a commonplace, good-natured woman, evidently knew who all the other party were, and readily made acquaintance with Miss Charlecote,

who had, on her side, the same strange impression of knowing the name as Phœbe had of knowing the face.

Bertha, who slept in the same room with Phœbe, awoke her in the morning with the question, 'What do you think is Miss Holmby's name?'

'I did not hear it mentioned.'

'No, but you ought to guess. Do you not see how names impress their own individuality? You need not laugh; I know they do. Could you possibly have been called Augusta, and did not Katharine quite pervade Miss Fennimore?'

'Well, according to your theory, what is her name?'

'It is either Eleanor or Cecily.'

'Indeed!' cried Phœbe; 'what put that into your head?'

'Her expression—no, her entire *Wesen*. Something homely, simple, a little old-fashioned, and yet refined.'

'It is odd,' said Phœbe, pausing.

'What is odd?'

'You have explained the likeness I could not make out. I once saw a photograph of a Cecily, with exactly the character you mention. It was that of which she reminded me.'

'Cecily? Who could it have been?'

'One of the Raymond cousinhood. What o'clock is it?'

'Oh, don't get up yet, Phœbe; I want to tell you Miss Holmby's history, as I make it out. She said she was not ill, but I am convinced that her uncle and aunt took her abroad to give her change, not after illness, but sorrow.'

'Yes, I am sure she has known trouble.'

'And,' said Bertha, stifling her voice, so that her sister could hardly hear, 'that sorrow could have been only of one kind. Patient waiting is stamped on her brow. She is trying to lift up her head after cruel disappointment. Oh, I hope he is dead!'

And, to Phœbe's surprise and alarm, the poor little

fortune-teller burst into tears, and sobbed violently. There could be no doubt that her own disappointment, rather than that which she ascribed to a stranger, prompted this gush of feeling ; but it was strange, for in all the past months the poor child's sorrow and shame had been coldly, hardly, silently borne. The new scenes had thrust it into abeyance, and spirits and strength had forced trouble aside, but this was the only allusion to it since her conversation with Miss Charlecote on her sick bed, and the first sign of softening. Phœbe durst not enter into the subject, but soothed and composed her by caresses and cheerfulness ; but either the tears, or perhaps their original cause—the fatigue and terror of the previous day—had entirely unhinged her, and she was in such a nervous, trembling state, and had so severe a headache, that she was left lying down, under Lieschen's charge, when the others went to the English chapel. Her urgent entreaty was that they would bring Miss Holmby to her on their return. She had conceived almost a passion for this young lady. Secluded as she had been, no intercourse beyond her own family had made known to her the pleasure of a friendship ; and her mind, in its revival from its long exhaustion, was full of ardour, in the enthusiasm of a girl's adoration of a full-grown woman. The new and softening sensation was infinite gain, even by merely lessening her horror of society ; and when the three churchgoers joined the Holmby party on their way back from the chapel, they begged, as a kindness to an invalid, for a visit to Bertha.

It was granted most readily, as if equally pleasant to the giver of the kindness and to the receiver, and the two young maidens walked home together. Phœbe could not but explain their gratitude to any one who could rouse Bertha, saying that her spirits had received a great shock, and that the effects of her illness on her speech and her eyes had made her painfully bashful.

‘I am so glad,’ was the hurried, rather quivering answer. ‘I am glad if I can be of any use.’

Phœbe was surprised, while gratified, by the eager tenderness of her meeting with Bertha, who, quite revived, was in the sitting-room to greet her, and seemed to expand like a plant in the sunshine, under the influence of those sweet brown eyes. Her liveliness and drollery awoke, and her sister was proud that her new friend should see her cleverness and intelligence ; but all the time the likeness to that photograph continued to haunt Phœbe's mind, as she continued to discover more resemblances, and to decide that if such were impressed by the Christian name, Bertha was a little witch to detect it.

Afternoon came, and as usual they all walked seawards. As Bertha said, they had had enough of the heights, and tried going towards the sea, as their new friend wished, although warned by the Fulmorts that it was a long walk, the *étangs*, or great salt pools, spoiling the coast as a beach. But all were brave walkers, and exercise always did Bertha good. They had lovely views of the town as they wound about the hills, and admired its old streets creeping up the hill, and the two long wings stretching on either side. An iron cross stood up before the old church, relieved by the exquisite radiance of the sunset sky. 'Ah!' said Honor, 'I always choose to believe that is the cross to which the legend belongs.' 'Tell it, please, Miss Charlecote,' cried Maria.

And Honor told a veritable legend of Hyères :—A Moorish princess, who had been secretly baptized and educated as a Christian by her nurse, a Christian slave, was beloved by a genie. She regarded him with horror, pined away, and grew thin and pale. Her father thought to raise her spirits by marrying her, and bestowed her on the son of a neighbouring king, sending her off in full procession to his dominions. On the way, however, lay a desert, where the genie had power to raise a sand-storm, with which he overwhelmed the suite, and flew away with the princess. But he could not approach her ; she kept him at bay

with the sign of the cross, until, enraged, he drove her about on a whirlwind for three days, and finally dashed her dead upon this coast. There she lay, fair as an almond blossom, and royally robed, and the people of Hyères took her up and gave her honourable burial. When the king her father heard of it, he offered to reward them with a cross of gold of the same weight as his daughter; but, said the townsmen, 'Oh, king, if we have a cross of gold, the Moors will come and slay us for its sake, therefore give us the gold in coin, and let the cross be of iron.'

'And there it stands,' said the guest, looking up.

'I hope it does,' said Honor, confronting, as usual, the common-sense led pupils of Miss Fennimore, with her willing demi-credulity.

'It is a beautiful story!' was the comment; 'and, like other traditions, full of unconscious meaning.'

A speech this, as if it had been made to delight Honor, whose eyes were met by a congratulatory glance from Phœbe. At the farther words, 'It is very striking—the evil spirit's power ending with the slaying the body, never harming the soul, nor bending the will——'

'Bending the will is harming the soul,' said Phœbe.

'Nay,' was her companion's answer, 'the fatal evil is, when both wills are bent.'

Phœbe was too single-minded, too single-willed, at once to understand this, till Miss Charlecote whispered a reference to St. Paul's words of deep experience, 'To will is present with me.'

'I see,' she said; 'she might even have preferred the genie, but as long as her principle and better will resisted, she was safe from herself as well as from him.'

'Liked the nasty genie?' said Maria, who had listened only as to a fairy tale. 'Why, Phœbe, genies come out of bottles, and go away in smoke, Lieschen told me.'

'No, indeed,' said Bertha, in a low voice of feeling, piteous in one of her years, 'if so, it needed no outward whirlwind to fling her dead on the coast!'

‘And there she found peace,’ answered the guest, with a suppressed, but still visible sigh of weariness. ‘Oh ! it was worth the whirlwind !’

Phœbe was forced to attend to Maria, whose imagination had been a good deal impressed, and who was anxious to make another attempt on a pilgrimage to castle and cross.

‘When Mervyn comes back, Maria, we may try.’

The guest, who was speaking, stopped short in the midst. Had she been infected by Bertha’s hesitation ? She began again, and seemed to have forgotten what she meant to have said. However, she recovered herself ; and there was nothing remarkable through the rest of the walk, but, on coming indoors, she managed to detain Phœbe behind the others, saying, lightly, ‘Miss Fulmort, you have not seen the view from my window.’ Phœbe followed to her little bedroom, and gazed out at the lovely isles, bathed in light so as to be almost transparent, and the ship of war in the bay, all shadowy and phantom-like. She spoke her admiration warmly, but met with but a half assent. The owner of the room was leaning her head against the glass, and, with an effort for indifference said, ‘Did I hear that—that you were expecting your brother ?’

‘You are Cecily !’ exclaimed Phœbe, instead of answering.

And Cecily, turning away from the window, leant against the wall for support, and her pale face crimsoning, said, ‘I thought you did not know.’

‘My sisters do not,’ said Phœbe ; ‘but he told me, when—when he hoped——’

‘And now you will help me ?’ said Cecily, hurrying out her words, as if overpowering one of her wills. ‘You will, I know ! I have promised my father and uncle to have nothing to do with him. Do not let me be taken by surprise. Give me notice, that I may get Aunt Holmby away before he comes.’

‘Oh! must it be so?’ cried Phœbe. ‘He is not like what he used to be.’

‘I have promised,’ repeated Cecily; and grasping Phœbe’s wrist, she added, ‘You will help me to keep my promise.’

‘I will,’ said Phœbe, in her grave, reliable voice, and Cecily drew a long breath.

There were five minutes of silence, while Phœbe stood studying Cecily, and thinking how much injustice she had done to her, how little she had expected a being so soft and feeling in her firmness, and grieving the more at Mervyn’s loss. Cecily at last spoke, ‘When will he come?’

‘We cannot tell; most likely not for a week, perhaps not for a fortnight. It depends on how he likes Corsica.’

‘I think my aunt will be willing to go,’ said Cecily. ‘My uncle has been talking of Nice.’

‘Then must we lose you,’ said Phœbe, ‘when you are doing Bertha so much good?’

‘I should like to be with you while I can, if I may,’ said Cecily, her eyes full of tears.

‘Did you know us at first?’ said Phœbe.

‘I knew you were in this hotel; and after your sisters had spoken, and I saw Bertha’s face, I was sure who she was. I thought no one was with you but Miss Charlecote, and that no one knew, so that I might safely indulge myself.’ The word was out before she could recall it, and trying, as it were, to hide it, she said, ‘But how, if you knew what had passed, did you not sooner know it was I?’

‘Because we thought your name was Holmby.’

‘Did you, indeed? You did not know that my aunt Holmby is my mother’s sister? She kindly took me when my uncle was ordered to spend this winter abroad?’

‘You were ill and tried. Bertha read that in your face. Oh! when you see how much difference——?’

'I must not see. Do not talk of it, or we must not be together ; and indeed it is very precious to me.' She rested her head on Phœbe's shoulder, and put an arm round her waist. 'Only one thing I must ask,' she said, presently; 'is he well?'

'Quite well,' said Phœbe. 'He has been getting better ever since we left home. Then you did not know he was with us?'

'No. It is not right for me to dwell on those things, and they never mention any of you to me.'

'But you will write to us now? You will not desert Bertha? You do not know how much you are doing for her.'

'Dear child! She is so like what he was when first he came.'

'If you could guess what she has suffered, and how fond he is of her, you would not turn away from her. You will let her be your friend?'

'If it be right,' said Cecily with tearful eyes, but her mouth set into a steadfast expression, as resolute as sweetly sad.

'You know better what is right than I do,' said Phœbe; 'I who feel for him and Bertha. But if you have not heard from him for so long, I think there are things you ought to know.'

'At home, at home,' said Cecily; 'there it may be right to listen. Here I am trusted alone, and I have only to keep my promise. Tell me when I am at home, and it will make me happy. Though, nonsense! my wizened old face is enough to cure him,' and she tried to laugh. Phœbe regretted what she had said of Bertha's impression, and believed that the gentle, worn face ought to be far more touching than the most radiant charms, but when she strove to say that it was not beauty that Mervyn loved, she was hushed at once, and by the same mild authority turned out of the room.

Well for her that she could tell her story to Miss Charlecote without breach of confidence! Honor's

first impulse was displeasure with the aunt, who she was sure had let her speak *of*, though not *to*, Miss Holmby without correcting her, and must purposely have kept the whole Raymond connexion out of sight. 'Depend upon it, Phœbe,' she said, 'she will keep her niece here.'

'Poor Cecily, what will she do? I wish they would go, for I feel sure that she will think it her duty to hold out against him till she has her father's sanction; she will seem hard, and he——'

'Do not reckon too much on him, Phœbe. Yes, it is a hard saying, but men care so much for youth and beauty, that he may find her less attractive. He may not understand how superior she must have become to what she was when he first knew her. Take care how you plead his cause without being sure of his sentiments.'

In fact, Honor thought Cecily Raymond so infinitely above Mervyn Fulmort, at his very best, that she could not regard the affair as hopeful under any aspect; and the parties concerned being just at the time of life when a woman becomes much the elder of a man of the same years, she fully expected that Cecily's loss of bloom would entirely take away his desire to pursue his courtship.

The next event was a diplomatic call from Mrs. Holmby, to sound Miss Charlecote, whose name she knew as a friend both of the Fulmorts and Moorcroft Raymonds, and who, she had feared, would use her influence against so unequal a match for the wealthy young squire. When convinced of her admiration of Cecily, the good aunt proceeded to condemn the Raymond pride. They called it religion, but she was not so taken in. What reasonable person heeded what a young man might have done when he was sowing his wild oats? No, it was only that the Baronet blood disdained the distillery, whereas the Fulmorts represented that good old family, the Mervyns, and it was a very fine estate, was not it? She had no patience with

such nonsense, not she ! All Sir John's doing ; for, between themselves, poor dear George Raymond had no spirit at all, and was quite under his brother's thumb. Such a family, and such a thing as it would be for them to have that girl so well married. *She* would not take her away. The place agreed with the Major, and she had told Cecily she could not think of leaving it.

Phœbe saw how close a guard Cecily must have learnt to keep on herself, for not a tone nor look betrayed that she was suffering unusual emotion. She occupied herself quietly, and was most tenderly kind to Bertha and Maria, exerting herself to converse with Bertha, and to enter into her pursuits as cheerfully as if her mind were disengaged. Sometimes Phœbe fancied that the exceeding gentleness of her voice indicated when she was most tried, but she attempted no more *tête-à-têtes*, and Miss Charlecote's conjecture that in the recesses of her heart she was rejoiced to be detained by no fault of her own, remained unverified. Phœbe resigned Cecily for the present to Bertha's exclusive friendship. Competition would have been unwise, even if the forbidden subject had not been a restraint where the secret was known, while to soothe and cherish Bertha and settle her mind to begin life again was a welcome and fitting mission for Cecily, and inclination as well as discretion therefore held Phœbe aloof, preventing Maria from interfering, and trusting that Cecily was becoming Bertha's Mr. Charlecote.

Mervyn came back sooner than she had expected him, having soon tired of Corsica. His year of ill-health and of her attendance had made him dependent on her ; he did not enter into novelty or beauty without Bertha ; and his old restless demon of discontent made him impatient to return to his ladies. So he took Phœbe by surprise, walking in as she was finishing a letter to Augusta before joining the others in the olivettes.

‘ Well, Phœbe, how's Bertha ? Ready to leave this hot vapour-bath of a hole ? ’

‘I don’t know what you will say to it now,’ she answered, looking down, and a little tremulous. ‘Who do you think is here?’

‘Not Hastings? If he dares to show his nose here, I’ll get him hissed out of the place.’

‘No, no, something very different.’

‘Well, make haste,’ he said, in the grim voice of a tired man.

‘She is here—Cecily Raymond.’

‘What of that?’ He sat down, folded his arms, and crossed his ankles, the picture of dogged indifference.

‘Mervyn!’

‘What does it matter to me who comes or goes? Don’t stop to rehearse arrivals, but ring for something to eat. An atrocious *mistral*! My throat is like a turnpike road! Call it January? It is a mockery!’

Phœbe obeyed him; but she was in a ferment of wrath and consternation, and clear of nothing save that Cecily must be prepared for his appearance. She was leaving the room when he called to ask what she was doing.

‘I am going to tell the others that you are come.’

‘Where are they?’

‘In the olive yards behind the hotel.’

‘Don’t be in such a hurry, and I’ll come.’

‘Thank you, but I had better go on before. Miss Raymond is with them.’

‘It makes no odds to her. Stop a minute, I tell you. What is the matter with her?’ (Said with some uneasiness, hidden by gruffness.)

‘She is not here for her own health, but Major Holmby is rheumatic.’

‘Oh! that intolerable woman is here, is she? Then you may give Miss Charlecote notice to pack up her traps, and we’ll set off to-morrow!’

If a desire to box a man’s ears ever tingled in Phœbe’s fingers, it was at that moment. Not trusting herself to utter a word, she went upstairs, put on her hat, and walked forth, feeling as if the earth had

suddenly turned topsy-turvy with her, and as if she could look no one in the face. Set off to-morrow ! He might tell Miss Charlecote himself, she would not ! Yet, after all, he had been rejected. His departure might not torture Cecily like the sight of his indifference. But what despair for Bertha, thought Phœbe, as she saw the friends pacing the paths between the rows of olives, while Miss Charlecote and Maria were gathering magnificent blue violets. At the first hint, Miss Charlecote called to Bertha, who came reluctantly, while Phœbe, with almost sickening pity, murmured her tidings to Cecily—adding, ‘I do not think he is coming out. He is having something to eat,’ in hopes that this tardiness might be a preparation. She was relieved that Bertha rushed back again to monopolize Miss Raymond, and overwhelm her with schemes for walks under Mervyn’s escort. Cecily let her talk, but made no promises, and the soft gentleness of those replies thrilled as pangs of pain on Phœbe’s pitying heart.

As they walked homewards, Mervyn himself appeared, slowly sauntering towards them. The younger sisters sprang to meet him, Cecily fell back to Miss Charlecote. Phœbe held her breath, and scarcely durst look. There was a touch of the hand, a greeting, then Bertha pounced on her brother to tell the adventure of the ravine ; and Cecily began to set Maria off about the flowers in her nosegay. Phœbe could only come close to Miss Charlecote and squeeze her hand vehemently.

The inn-door was reached, and Mervyn waiting till Cecily came up, said with grave formality, ‘I hear my sisters are indebted to you for your assistance in a very unpleasant predicament.’

She bowed, and he bowed. That was all, and they were in their several apartments. Phœbe had never felt in such a fever. She could discern character, but love was but an external experience to her, and she could not read the riddle of Mervyn’s repudiation

of intercourse with their fellow-inmates, and his restlessness throughout the evening, checking Bertha for boring about her friend, and then encouraging her to go on with what she had been saying. At last, however, Bertha voluntarily ceased her communications and could be drawn out no farther; and when the candle was put out at night, she electrified Phœbe with the remark, 'It is Mervyn, and you know it; so you may as well tell me all about it.'

Phœbe had no choice but compliance; advising Bertha not to betray her knowledge, and anxious to know the conclusions which this acute young woman would draw from the present conjuncture. But Bertha was too fond of both parties not to be full of unmitigated hope. 'Oh, Phœbe!' she said, 'with Cecily there, I shall not mind going home, I shall not mind anything.'

'If only she will be there.'

'Stuff, Phœbe! The more Mervyn sulks, the more it shows that he cares for her; and if she cares for him, of course it will come right.'

'Do you remember what she said about the two wills contending?'

'Well, if she ever *did* think Mervyn the genie, she has crossed him once, twice, thrice, till she may turn him from Urgan into Ethert Brand.'

'She thinks it her duty not to hear that she has.'

'Oh, ho! from you who know all about it; but didn't I tell her plenty about Mervyn's kindness to me? Yes, indeed I did. I couldn't help it, you know. It did not seem true to let anybody begin to be my friend unless she knew—*all that*. So I told her—and oh! Phœbe, she was so dear and nice, better than ever after that,' continued Bertha, with what sounded like sobs; 'and then you know she could not help hearing how good and patient he was with me—only growing kinder and kinder the more tiresome I was. She must feel that, Phœbe, must not she? And then she asked about Robert, and I told her how Mervyn has let him get a chaplain to look after the distillery

people, and the Institute that that old gin-palace is to be made into.'

'Those were just the things I was longing to tell her.'

'She could not stop *me*, you know, because I knew nothing,' cried Bertha, triumphantly. 'Are not you satisfied, Phœbe?'

'I ought to be, if I were sure of his feelings. Don't plunge about so, Bertha,—and I am not sure either that she will believe him yet to be a religious man.'

'Don't say that, Phœbe. I was just going to begin to like religion, and think it the only true key to metaphysics and explanation of existence, but if it sticks between those two, I shall only see it as a weak, rigid superstition, parting those who were meant for one another.'

Phœbe was strongly tempted to answer, but the little travelling clock struck, and thus acted as a warning that to let Bertha pursue an exciting discussion at this time of night would be ruinous to her nerves the next day. So with a good-night, the elder sister closed her ears, and lay pondering on the newly disclosed stage in Bertha's mind, which touched her almost as closely as the fate of her brother's attachment.

The ensuing were days of suppressed excitement, chiefly manifested by the yawning fits that seized on Bertha whenever no scene in the drama was passing before her. In fact, the scenes presented little. Cecily was not allowed to shut herself up, and did nothing remarkable, though avoiding the walks that she would otherwise have taken with the Fulmort party; and when she found that Bertha was aware of her position, firmly making silence on that head the condition of their interviews. Mervyn let her alone, and might have seemed absolutely indifferent, but for the cessation of all complaints of Hyères, and for the noteworthy brightness, obligingness, and good humour of his manners. Even in her absence, though

often restless and strangely watchful, he was always placable and good-tempered, never even scolding Phœbe ; and in her presence, though he might not exchange three words, or offer the smallest service, there was a repose and content on his countenance that gave his whole expression a new reading. He was looking particularly well, fined down into alertness by his disciplined life and hill climbing, his complexion cleared and tanned by mountain air, and the habits and society of the last year leaving an unconscious impress unlike that which he used to bring from his former haunts. Phœbe wondered if Cecily remarked it. She was not aware that Cecily did not know him without that restful look.

Phœbe came to the conclusion that Cecily was persuaded of the cessation of his attachment, and was endeavouring to be thankful, and to accustom herself to it. After the first, she did not hide herself to any marked degree ; and, probably to silence her aunt, allowed that lady to take her on one of the grand Monday expeditions, when all the tolerably sound visiting population of Hyères were wont to meet, to the number of thirty or forty, and explore the scenery. Exquisite as were the views, these were not romantic excursions, the numbers conducing to gossip and chatter, but there were some who enjoyed them the more in consequence ; and Mervyn, who had been loudest in vituperation of his first, found the present perfectly delightful, although the chief of his time was spent in preventing Mrs. Holmby's cross-grained donkey from lying down to roll, and administering to the lady the chocolate drops that he carried for Bertha's sustenance ; Cecily, meantime, being far before with his sisters, where Mrs. Holmby would gladly have sent him if bodily terror would have permitted her to dismiss her cavalier.

Miss Charlecote and Phœbe, being among the best and briskest of the female walkers, were the first to enter the town, and there, in the *Place des Palmiers*,

looking about him as if he were greatly amazed at himself, they beheld no other than the well-known figure of Sir John Raymond, standing beside the Major, who was sunning himself under the palm-trees.

‘Miss Charlecote, how are you? How d’ye do, Miss Fulmort? Is your sister quite well again? Where’s my little niece?’

‘Only a little way behind with Bertha.’

‘Well, we never thought to meet in such a place, did we? What a country of stones I have come over to-day, enough to break the heart of a farmer; and the very sheep are no better than goats! Vineyards? What they call vineyards are old black stumps that ought to be grubbed up for firewood!’

‘Nay, I was struck by the wonderful cultivation of every available inch of ground. It speaks well for the Provençals, if we judge by the proverb, “*Autant vaut l’homme que vaut sa terre.*”’

‘Ah! there she comes;’ and he hastened to join Cecily, while the deserted Bertha, coming up to her sister, muttered, ‘Wretched girl! I hear she had written to him to fetch her home. That was what made her stay so quietly, was it?’

No one could accuse Mervyn of indifference who saw the blank look that overspread his face on hearing of Sir John’s arrival, but he said not a word, only hurried away to dress for the *table d’hôte*. The first notice the anxious ladies had that the tedious dinner was broken up, was a knock at their door, and Cecily’s entrance, looking exceedingly white, and speaking very low. ‘I am come to wish you good-bye,’ she said. ‘Uncle John has been so kind as to come for me, and I believe we shall set out to-morrow.’

Maria alone could dare to shriek out, ‘Oh! but you promised to show me how to make a crown of my pink heaths, and I have been out with Lieschen, and gathered such beauties!’

‘If you will come with me to my room I will show you while I pack up,’ said Cecily, reducing Bertha to

despair by this most effectual barrier to confidence ; but she entreated leave to follow, since seeing Cecily playing with Maria was better than not seeing her at all.

After some time, Mervyn came in, flushed and breathless, and Honor kindly made an excuse for leaving him alone with Phœbe. After diligently tossing a book from one hand to the other for some minutes, he observed, *sotto voce*, 'That's a more decent old fellow than I gave him credit for.'

'Who, Sir John?'

'Aye.'

And that was the whole result of the *tête-à-tête*. He was in no mood for questions, and marched out of the room for a moonlight cigar. Phœbe only remained with the conviction that something had happened.

Miss Charlecote was more fortunate. She had met the Baronet in the passage, and was accosted by him with, 'Do you ever do such a thing as take a turn on that terrace?'

It was a welcome invitation, and in no more time than it took to fetch a shawl, the two old friends were pacing the paved terrace together.

'Well, what do you think of him?' began Sir John. 'There must be more good in him than I thought.'

'Much more than I thought.'

'He has been speaking to me, and I can't say but that I was sorry for him, though why it should have gone so hard with so sensible and good a girl as Cecily to give up such a scamp, I never could guess! I told George that seeing what I saw of him, and knowing what I knew, I could think it nothing better than a sacrifice to give her to him!'

'Exactly what I thought!'

'After the way he had used her too—talking nonsense to her, and then playing fast and loose, trying his luck with half the young ladies in London, and then fancying she would be thankful to him as soon as he wanted a wife to keep house! Poor child, that would

not have weighed with her a moment though—it puts me out of patience to know how fond she is of him—but for his scampishness, which made it a clear duty to refuse him. Very well she behaved, poor thing, but you see how she pined away—though her mother tells me that not a fretful word was ever heard from her, as active and patient and cheerful as ever. Then the Holmbys took her abroad, the only thing to save her health, but I never trusted the woman, and when by and by she writes to her father that Fulmort was coming, and her aunt would not take her away, “George,” I said, “never mind ; I’ll go at once, and bring her home—she shall not be kept there to be torn to pieces between her feelings and her duty.” And now I am come, I declare I don’t know what to be at—I should think nothing of it if the lad only talked of reforming—but he looks so downcast, and owns so honestly that we were quite right, and then that excellent little sister of his is so fond of him, and you have stood his company this whole year—that I declare I think he must be good for something ! Now you who have looked on all his life, just say what you think of him—such a way as he went on in last year, too—the crew that he got about him——’

‘Phoebe thinks that was the consequence of his disappointment.’

‘A man that could bring such a lot into the same house with that sister of his, had no business to think of Cecily.’

‘He has suffered for it, and pretty severely, and I do think it has done him good. You must remember that he had great disadvantages.’

‘Which didn’t hinder his brother from turning out well.’

‘Robert went to a public school——’ and there she perceived she was saying something awkward, but Sir John half laughed and assented.

‘Quite right, Miss Charlecote ; private pupils are a delusion ! George never had one without a screw

loose about him. Parish priests were never meant for tutors—and I've told my boy, Charlie, that the one thing I'll never consent to is his marrying on pupils—and doing two good things by halves. It has well nigh worried his uncle to death, and Cecily into the bargain.'

'Robert was younger, and the elders were all worse managed. Besides, Mervyn's position, as it was treated, made him discontented and uncomfortable; and this attachment, which he was too—too—I can find no word for it but contemptible—to avow, must have preyed on his temper and spirits all the time he was trying to shake it off. He was brought up to selfishness, and nothing but what he underwent last year could have shaken him out of it.'

'Then you think he is shaken out of it?'

'Where Bertha is concerned I see that he is—therefore I should hope it with his wife.'

'Well, well, I suppose what must be must be. Not that I have the least authority to say anything, but I could not help telling the poor fellow thus much—that if he went on steadily for a year or so, and continued in the same mind, I did not see why he should not ask my brother and Cecily to reconsider it. Then it will be for them to decide, you know.'

For them! As if Sir John were not in character as well as name the guiding head of the family.

'And now,' he added, 'you will let me come to your rooms this evening, for Mrs. Holmby is in such displeasure with me, that I shall get nothing but black looks. Besides, I want to see a little more of that nice girl, his sister.'

'Ah! Sir John, if ever you do consent, it will be more than half for love of Phœbe!'

'Well, for a girl like that to be so devoted to him—her brother though he be—shows there must be more in him than meets the eye. That's just the girl that I would not mind John's marrying.'



CHAPTER XIII.

Turn again, Whittington !

Bow Bells.

MAY had come round again before Robert Fulmort stood waiting at the Waterloo Station to welcome the travellers, who had been prohibited from putting Bertha's restored health to the test of east winds. It was a vista of happy faces that he encountered as he looked into the carriage window, yet the first questions and answers were grave and mournful.

'Is Mr. Henderson still alive?' asked Honora.

'No, he sank rapidly, and died on Sunday week. I was at the funeral on Saturday.'

'Right; I am glad you went. I am sorry I was away.'

'It was deeply felt. Nearly all the clergy in the archdeaconry, and the entire parish, were present.'

'Who is taking care of the parish?'

'Charlecote Raymond has been coming over for the Sundays, and giving great satisfaction.'

'I say, Robert, where's the Bannerman carriage? Phœbe is to be victimized there—more's the pity,' interposed Mervyn.

'There is their brougham. I meant to drive to Albury-street with her,' said Robert, gazing at his brother as if he scarcely knew him without the characteristic knitting of the brow under a grievance, the scowl, or the half-sneering smile; and with the cleared and lightened air that he had worn ever since that little spark of hope

had been left to burn and shine undamped by dissipation or worldly policy. Bertha also was changed. She had grown tall and womanly, her looks beyond her age, and if her childish vivacity were gone, the softened gravity became her much better. It was Phœbe's report, however, for which he chiefly longed, and he was soon seated beside her on the way to Albury-street, while the others betook themselves Citywards.

'So, Phœbe, it is all right, and you are satisfied?'

'Satisfied, grateful, thankful to the utmost,' said Phœbe, fervently. 'I think I never was so happy as all through the latter part of the journey.'

'You think well of Bertha?'

'I cannot call her restored, for she is far more than she was before. That meeting with Cecily Raymond did for her what we could not do, and she is growing to be more than we knew how to wish for.'

'Her spirits?'

'Never high, and easily shaken. Her nerves are not strong yet, and she will never, I fear, be quite girlishly careless and merry, but she is grave and sweet. She does not shrink from people now, and when I saw her among other girls at Paris, she seemed older, much deeper, and altogether superior.'

'Does she think seriously?'

'She thinks and reads, but it is not easy to guess what she thinks, for she keeps silence, and has happily quite left off arguing with Miss Charlecote. I believe Cecily has great influence over her, and I think she will talk a great deal to Miss Fennimore. Robin, do you think we could have dear Miss Fennimore again?'

'I do not know what Mr. Parsons would say to you. As you know, she told him that she wanted to do the most useful work he could trust to her, so he has made her second mistress at the day-school for his tradesmen's daughters; and what they would do without her I cannot think!'

‘She must have very insufficient pay.’

‘Yes, but I think she is glad of that, and she had saved a good deal.’

‘I give you notice that I shall try hard to get her, if Mr. Crabbe will only let us be as we were before. Do you think there is any hope for us?’

‘I cannot tell. I suspect that he will not consent to your going home till Mervyn is married; and Augusta wants very much to have you, for the season at least.’

‘Mervyn and Miss Charlecote both say I ought to see a little of the London world, and she promises to keep Maria and Bertha till we see our way. I should not like them to be without me anywhere else. You have not told me of poor Bevil. You must have seen him often.’

‘Yes, he clings very much to me, poor fellow, and is nearly as much cast down as at first. He has persuaded himself that poor Juliana always continued what he thought her when they met in their youth. Perhaps she had the germs of it in her, but I sometimes hardly know which way to look when he is talking about her, and then I take shame to myself for the hard judgments I cannot put away even now!’

‘Poor Juliana!’ said Phœbe, saddened by her own sense that the difficulties of her present position were lessened by the removal of this sister. ‘And little Elizabeth?’

‘She is a nice little thing, and her father hardly lets her out of his sight. I have sometimes speculated whether he might not ask you to keep house for him, but last time I saw him, I fancied that he was inclined to hold aloof from you.’

‘I had rather he did not ask us,’ said Phœbe.

‘Why so?’

‘Because I am afraid Bertha would not look up to him if she lived with him,’ said Phœbe.

Robert smiled, having himself become conscious of

that weakness in his good brother-in-law which Phœbe felt, but did not name.

‘And now, Phœbe,’ said Robert, suddenly changing the subject, ‘I have something for you to do ; I want you to call on Miss Sandbrook.’

On her astonished look, he explained that he had made it his business frequently to see Owen Sandbrook’s child, and of late to give it some religious teaching. While thus engaged, he had been surprised by the entrance of Lucilla, looking wretchedly ill and exhausted, and though she had rallied her spirits after the first moment, talked of having come up from Essex for a day’s holiday of shopping and seeing her nephew, and had inquired eagerly and warmly for Miss Charlecote ; he had been sufficiently uneasy about her to go afterwards to Mrs. Murrell, from whom he had learnt that she had avowed having consulted a physician in the morning, and had procured her address.

‘And now,’ said Robert, ‘I want you, with whom she has never quarrelled, to call on her as an old friend just come into her neighbourhood, and find out what was the doctor’s opinion. I am sure she is destroying herself.’

The whole was said with perfect simplicity, without shrinking from Phœbe’s eye, as though he had absolutely forgotten what sentiments he had once entertained ; and Phœbe could, neither in kindness nor humanity, refuse to be the means of reopening communication with the voluntary exile. She proposed to write and offer a call, but Robert, fearing to rouse the old perverse pride, recommended that there should be no preparation. Indeed, the chances of an independent expedition seemed likely to be scanty, for Lady Bannerman pounced on her sister as a truant bond-slave, who, when captured, was to be useful all day, and go to parties all night.

‘I have told all my friends that I was going to introduce my sister, and what expectations you have,’ she said. ‘See, here are two cards for to-morrow night,

Lady Jane Hewett and Mrs. Gosling, the young widow that I want Mervyn to meet, you know. Clear 5000*l.* a year, and such a charming house. Real first-rate suppers ; not like Lady Jane's bread-and-butter and cat-lap, as Sir Nicholas says, just handed round. We would never go near the place, but as I said to Sir Nicholas, any sacrifice for my sister ; and she has a son, you know, a fine young man ; and if we manage well, we shall be in time for Carrie Gosling's supper. So mind that, Phœbe, and don't get engaged to too many dances.'

'Is there to be dancing?'

'Most likely. I hope you have something to wear.'

'I provided myself at Paris, thank you.'

'Not mourning, I trust ! That will never do ! Nobody thinks of mourning for a sister more than six months, and it makes me so low to think of poor Juliana, and this horrid complaint being in the family. It is quite a duty to keep one's spirits up. But there's Robert always so lugubrious ; and poor Sir Bevil looks as deplorable, and comes up to town with that poor little girl all in crape, and wont eat any luncheon ! I declare it gave me such a turn that I was obliged to have my little cordial before I could swallow a mouthful ! And now you come in black ! It is quite provoking ! You must and shall get some colours to-morrow.'

'Thank you, what I have is white and lilac.'

On which neutral ground Phœbe took her stand, and the French style and fashion so impressed Augusta's maid, that she forced her ladyship to accept even simplicity as 'the thing,' and to sink back rebuked for the barbarism of hinting at the enlivenment of pink ribbons or scarlet flowers.

Though thus fortified against shopping on her own account, liberty even to go to see her sisters was denied her, in Augusta's infinite disgust at the locality, and consideration for the horses. She was forced to be contented with the report of Mervyn, who came to dinner and to go to the evening parties, and who spoke of the girls as well and happy ; Maria 'in her native

element' at the infant school, and both in a perfect rapture at receiving Miss Fennimore, whom their hostess had asked to spend the evening in Woolstone Lane.

Mervyn professed that he came entirely to see Phœbe's *début* in her Parisian costume, and amused himself maliciously with endeavouring to delay the start from Lady Jane's till too late for Mrs. Gosling's supper ; but Phœbe, who did not wish to enhance the sacrifice, would not abet him, and positively, as he declared, aided Augusta in her wild-goose chase.

He contrived to have a good deal of conversation with Phœbe in the course of the evening, and she heard from him that old Crabbe was more crusty than ever, and would not hear of his taking his sisters home, but, said he, that mattered the less, considering that now they would be able to be at the parsonage.

'The parsonage?'

'What ! did you not know the living was in Miss Charlecote's gift?'

'Do you mean that she has offered it to Robert?'

'Yes—no—at least she has told me of her intentions. Highly proper in the old girl, isn't it? They will settle it to-night of course. I'll have the grounds laid out, and make quite a pretty modern place of it. It has quite taken a weight off my mind to know he is so well provided for.'

'It will make us all very happy ; but I think he will be sorry for St. Matthew's, too.'

'Oh ! parsons think nothing of changes. He can appoint his own successor, and I'll not let things die away. And now, Phœbe, is there anything you want to do? I will not have Augusta tie you by the leg. I will look out a lady's horse to-morrow, and come to ride with you ; or if you want to do anything, you can have the brougham any day.'

'Thank you ; there is one thing I want very much to do,' and she explained.

'Ha !' said Mervyn, 'a romantic meeting. If I remember right, Mr. Robin used to be much smitten

with that little thing. Don't reckon too much on the parsonage, Phœbe.'

'What are we to do if both brothers turn us out?' smiled Phœbe.

'Don't talk of that. I should be glad enough to get you in—and I am far enough from *the other thing* yet.'

So Phœbe obtained the use of the brougham for the next day, and set off for her long Essex drive, much against Augusta's will, and greatly wondering what it would produce; compassionate of course for poor Lucilla, yet not entirely able to wish that Robert should resign the charge for which he was so eminently fitted, even for the sake of Hiltonbury and home. Lucy must be altered, indeed, if he would not be happier without her.

Phœbe had written a few lines, saying that hearing that Lucy was so near, she could not help begging to see her. This she sent in with her card, and after a little delay, was invited to come in. Lucilla met her at the top of the stairs, and at first Phœbe only felt herself clasped, clung to, kissed, fondled with a sudden, gasping, tearful eagerness. Then, as if striving to recal the ordinary tone, Lucilla exclaimed—'There—I beg your pardon for such an obstreperous greeting, but I am a famished creature here, you see, and I did not expect such kindness. Luckily some of my pupils are driving out with their mamma, and I have sent the others to the nurse. Now then, take off your bonnet, let me see you; I want to look at a home face, and you are as fresh and as innocent as if not a year had passed over you.'

Lucilla fervently kissed her again, and then holding her hand, gazed at her as if unwilling that either should break the happy silence. Meantime Phœbe was shocked to see how completely Robert's alarms were justified by Lucy's appearance. The mere absence of the coquettish ringlets made a considerable difference, and the pale colour of the hair, as it was plainly braided, increased the wanness of her appearance.

The transparent complexion had lost the lovely carnation of the cheek, but the meandering veins of the temples and eyelids were painfully apparent; and with the eyes so large and clear as to be more like veronicas than ever, made the effect almost ghastly, together with the excessive fragility of the form, and the shadowy thinness of the hand that held Phœbe's. Bertha's fingers, at her weakest, had been more substantial than these small things, which had, however, as much character and force in their grasp as ever.

'Lucy, I am sure you are ill! How thin you are!'

'Well, then, cod-liver oil is a base deception! Never mind that—let me hear of Honor—are you with her?'

'No, my sisters are, but I am with Augusta.'

'Then you do not come from her?'

'No; she does not know.'

'You excellent Phœbe; what have you done to keep that bonny honest face all this time to refresh weary eyes—being a little heroine, too. Well, but the Honor—the old sweet Honey—is she her very self?'

'Indeed, I hope so; she has been so very kind to us.'

'And found subjects in you not too cross-grained for her kindness to be palatable! Ah! a good hard plunge into the world teaches one what one left in the friendly ship! Not that mine has been a hard one. I am not one of the pathetic governesses of fiction. Every one has been kinder to me than I am worth—But, oh! to hear myself called Lucy again!—and she hid her face on Phœbe's shoulder in another access of emotion.

'You used not to like it.'

'My Cilly days were over long ago. Only one person ever used to call me Cilla;' and she paused, and went on afresh—'So it was for Bertha's sake and Mervyn's that Honor escorted you abroad. So much Robert told me; but I don't understand it yet. It

had haunted me the whole winter that Robert was the only Mr. Fulmort *she* could nurse ; and if he told you I was upset, it was that I did not quite know whether he were ghost or body when I saw him there in the old place.'

'No, he only told me you were looking very ill ; and indeed——'

'I could not ask him what concatenation made Honor take Mervyn under her wing, like a hen hovering a vulture.'

'It would be a long story,' said Phœbe ; 'but Bertha was very ill, and Mervyn much out of health ; and we were in great distress for an escort. I think it was the kindest thing ever done, and the most successful.'

'Has it been a comfort to her? Owen's letters must be, I am sure. He will come home this autumn, as soon as he has done laying out his railway, and then I shall get him to beg leave for me to make a little visit at Hiltonbury before we go out to Canada. I could not go out without a good word from her. She and Mr. Prendergast are all that remains of the old life. I say, Phœbe, did you hear of those cousins of mine?'

'It was one of the reasons I wished to see you. I thought you might like to hear of them.'

'You saw them?'

'Miss Charteris called on us at Nice. She—oh, Lucy! you will be surprised—she is a Plymouth sister!'

'Rashe!—old Rashe! We reverse the old transformation, butterflies into grubs!' cried Lucy, with somewhat spasmodic laughter. 'Tell me how the wonder came about.'

'I know little about it,' said Phœbe. 'Miss Charlecote thought most likely it was the first earnest kind of religion that presented itself when she was craving for some such help.'

'Did Honor make such a liberal remark? There,

I am sorry I said it ; but let me hear of dear old Rashe. Has it made her very grim ?

‘ You know it is not an embellishing dress, and she did look gaunt and haggard ; but still somehow we liked her better than ever before ; and she is so very good and charitable.’

‘ Ha ! Nice is a grand place for colporteurs and tracts. She would be a shining specimen there, and dissipation, religious or otherwise, old Rashe *must* have.’

‘ Not only in that line,’ said Phœbe, suppressing a smile at the truth of the surmise, ‘ but she is all kindness to sick English——’

‘ She tried to convert you all !—confess it. Rashe converting dear old Honor ! Oh ! of all comical conjunctions !’

‘ Miss Charlecote hushed it down,’ said Phœbe ; ‘ and, indeed, nobody could be with her and think that she needed rousing to religious thoughts.’

‘ By this attempt on Honor, I fear she has not succeeded with Lolly, who, poor Owen used to call an Eastern woman with no soul.’

‘ She does everything for Mrs. Charteris—dresses her, works for her—I do believe cooks for her. They live a strange, rambling life.’

‘ I have heard Lolly plays as deeply as Charles, does not she ? All Castle Blanch mortgaged—would be sold but that Uncle Kit is in the entail ! It breaks one’s heart to hear it ! They all live on generous old Ratia, I suppose.’

‘ I believe she pays the bills when they move. We were told that it was a beautiful thing to see how patiently and resolutely she goes on bearing with them and helping them, always in hopes that at last they may turn to better things.’

Lucy was much touched. ‘ Poor Rashe !’ she said ; ‘ there was something great in her. I have a great mind to write to her.’

They diverged into other subjects, but every minute

she became more open and confidential ; and as the guarded reserve wore off, Phœbe contrived to lead to the question of her spirits and health, and obtained a fuller answer.

‘Till you try, Phœbe, you can’t guess the wear of living with minds that have got nothing in them but what you have put in yourself. There seems to be a fur growing over one’s intellects for want of something to rub against.’

‘Miss Fennimore must often have felt that with us.’

‘No, you were older ; and besides, you have some originality in a sober way ; and I don’t imagine Miss Fennimore had the sore heart at the bottom—the foolishness that took to moaning after home as soon as it had cast it off past recal !’

‘Oh, Lucy ! not past recal.’

‘Not past pardon, I am trying to hope. At least, there are some people who, the more unpardonable one is, pardon the more readily. When Owen comes home I mean to try.’

‘Ah ! I saw you had been going through a great deal.’

‘No, no, don’t charge my looks on sentiment,’ said Cilla, hastily ; ‘there’s plenty to account for them besides. One never falls into those foibles when one is quite strong.’

‘Then you have been unwell ?’

‘Not to the point of giving in. Oh, no ! “Never say die” was always my motto, you know.’

‘To what point, dear Lucy ?’

‘To that of feeling as if the entire creation was out of joint—not one child here and there, but everybody was cross ; and I could not walk with the children, and my bones ached, and all that sort of thing.’

‘You had advice ?’

‘Yes, I thought it economical to patch myself up in time ; so I asked for a holiday to go to the doctor.’

‘Well ?’

‘He did after the nature of doctors ; poked me about, and asked if there were decline in the family ;’ and in spite of the smile, the great blue eyes looked ghastly ; ‘and he forbade exertion, and ordered good living and cod-liver oil.’

‘Then surely you should be taking care.’

‘So I am. These are very good-natured people, and I’m a treasure of a governess, you know. I have reflections ten times a day, and might swim in port wine, and the little Swiss *bonne* walks the children, and gives them an awful accent, which their mamma thinks the correct thing.’

‘Change—rest—you should have them.’

‘I shall, when Owen comes. It is summer time, and I shall hold on till then, when it will be plenty of time to see whether this is nonsense.’

‘Whether what is ?’

‘About my lungs. Don’t look horrified. He could only trace the remains of a stupid old cold, and if it were more, I know of no fact of so little moment to anybody.’

‘You should not say that, Lucy ; it is wrong and cruel.’

‘It is your fault ; I did not want to have talked of it, and in good time here comes half my flock ; Edie, Reggie, Flo, come and show Miss Fulmort what my torments are.’

They ran in, apparently on excellent terms with her, and greeted her guest without shyness ; but after a little whispering and shoving the youngest spoke. ‘Edie and Reggie want to know if she is the lady that put out the light ?’

‘Ah ! you heroine,’ said Lucy, ‘you don’t know how often I have told of your doughty deeds ! Ay, look at her, she is the robber-baffler ; though now I look at her I don’t quite believe it myself.’

‘But it is true ?’ asked the little girl, puzzled.

‘Tell us all the story,’ added the boy.

‘Yes ; tell us,’ said Lucilla. ‘I read all your evi-

dence, so like yourself as it was, but I want to know where you were sleeping.'

Phœbe found her present audience strangely more embarrassing than the whole assize court, perhaps because there the solemn purpose swallowed up the sense of admiration; but she laughed at last at the boy's disappointment at the escape of the thieves; 'he would have fired a pistol through the keyhole and shot them!' When she rose to go, the children entreated her to stay and be seen by the others, but this she was glad to escape, though Lucilla clung to her with a sort of anguish of longing, yet stifled affection, that would have been most painful to witness, but for the hopes for her relief.

Phœbe ordered her brother's carriage in time to take her to breakfast in Woolstone Lane the next morning, and before ten o'clock Honor had heard the account of the visit in Essex. Tearfully she thanked the trusty reconnoitrer as for a kindness to herself, dwelling on the tokens of relenting, yet trembling at the tidings of the malady. To write and recal her child to her motherly nursing was the foremost thought in her strange medley of grief and joy, hope and fear.

'Poor Robert,' she said, when she understood that he had organized Phœbe's mission; 'I am glad I told him to give no answer for a week.'

'Mervyn told me how kind you were about Hilton-bury.'

'Kind to myself, my dear. It seems like a crime when I look at St. Matthew's; but when I think of you all, and of home, I believe it is right that he should have the alternative. And now, if poor Lucy come, and it be not too late——'

'Did he say anything?' said Phœbe.

'I only wrote to him; I thought he had rather not let me see his first impulse, so I told him to let me hear nothing till Thursday evening. I doubted before, now I feel sure he will take it.'

'Lucy has the oldest claim,' said Phœbe, thought-

fully, wishing she could feel equally desirous of success in this affair as in that of Mervyn and Cecily.

‘Yes, she was his first love, before Whittingtonia. Did you mention the vacancy at Hiltonbury?’

‘No ; there was so much besides to talk of.’

‘That is well ; for perhaps if she knew, that spirit of hers might keep her aloof. I feel like Padre Cristoforo dispensing Lucia from her vow ! If she will only get well ! And a little happiness will do more than all the cods in Hammerfest ! Phœbe, we will have a chapel-school at the hamlet, and a model kitchen at the school ; and Robert will get hold of all the big boys. His London experience is exactly what we want to brighten Hiltonbury, and all our clergy.’

Hiltonbury had a right to stand first with Honora, and Whittingtonia had sunk into a mere training-school for her pattern parson. If there were a sigh to think that Owen was exactly of the right age to have been ordained to Hiltonbury, she put it away, for this was next best.

Her note to Lucilla was penned with trembling caution, and each word was reconsidered day and night, in case the perverse temper might take umbrage. The answer came.

‘MY DEAR HONOR,

‘It is beyond my deserts to be so kindly taken home. I have learnt what that means now. I can be spared for a fortnight ; and as Mr. Bostock dines in town the day after to-morrow, he will set me down.

Your affectionate,

‘L. SANDBROOK.’

‘Miss Charlecote is like a person ten years younger,’ observed Bertha to Phœbe, when she came with the rest to ‘quite a family party,’ at Albury-street. Robert alone was absent, it being what Augusta called ‘a fast or something ;’ *i. e.*, a meeting of the St. Wulstan’s Young Men’s Institute. Bertha heartily wished she

could call herself a young man, for her morbid sense of disgrace always recurred with those whom she knew to be cognizant of her escapade. However, this evening made a change in her ladyship's views, or rather she had found Phœbe, no longer the mere submissive handmaid of school-room days, but a young woman accustomed to liberty of action and independence of judgment; and though perfectly obliging and unselfish, never admitting Augusta's claims on her time to the exclusion of those of others of the family, and quietly but decidedly carrying out her intentions. Bertha's shrinking silence and meekness of demeanour persuaded her sister that she would be more conformable, and her womanly appearance not only rendered the notion of school ridiculous, but inspired the desire of bringing her out. Phœbe might dedicate herself to Maria if she pleased; Bertha should shine through the season under her sister's patronage.

Not since the adventure with the Hyères peasants had Bertha's tongue been so unmanageable, as when she tried to protest against going into society; and when Mervyn came to her help, Augusta owned that such hesitation was indeed an objection, but it might easily be cured by good management; cordials would prevent nervousness, and, after all, no one would care when a girl had such a fortune. Poor Bertha crept away, feeling as if she could never open her mouth again.

Meanwhile Mervyn and Augusta amicably agreed on the excellence of Hiltonbury parsonage as a home for the girls, the latter only regretting what Robert had sunk on his fancies at Whittingtonia. 'I don't know that,' returned Mervyn; 'all I regret is that we never took our share. It is a different thing now, I assure you, to see the turn out from the distillery since the lads have come under his teaching! I only hope his successor may do as well!'

'Well, I don't understand about such things,' said Augusta, crossly. 'Poor papa never made such a

roust about the hands. It would not have been thought good taste to bring them forward.'

'If you wish to understand,' said Mervyn, maliciously, 'you had better come and see. Robert would be very glad of your advice for the kitchen he is setting going—sick cookery and cheap dinners.'

'And pray who pays for them? Robert has made himself a beggar. Is it you?'

'No! those who eat. It is to be self-supporting. I do nothing but lend the house. You don't remember it. It is the palace at the corner of Richard alley.'

'It is no concern of mine, I know; but what is to become of the business if you go giving away the houses?'

'Oh! I am getting into the foreign and exportation line. It is infinitely less bother.'

'Ah, well! I am glad my poor father does not see it. He would have said the business was going to the dogs!'

'No; he was fast coming into Robert's views, and I heartily wish I had not hindered him.'

Augusta told her admiral that evening that there was no hope for the family, since Robert had got hold of Mervyn as well as of the rest of them. People in society actually asked her about the schools and playground at Mr. Fulmort's distillery; there had been an educational report about them. Quite disgusting!

There passed a day of conflicting hope and fear, soothed by the pleasure of preparation, and at seven in the evening there came the ring at the house door, and Lucilla was once more in Honora's arms. It was for a moment a convulsive embrace, but it was not the same lingering clinging as when she met Phœbe, nor did she look so much changed as then, for there was a vivid tint of rose on either cheek; she had restored her hair to the familiar fashion, and her eyes were bright with excitement. The presence of Maria and Bertha, which Miss Charlecote had regretted, was probably a relief; for Lucilla, as she threw off her bonnet, and sat down to the 'severe tea' awaiting her,

talked much to them, observed upon their growth, noticed the little Maltese dog, and compared her continental experiences with Bertha's. To Honor she scarcely spoke voluntarily, and cast down her eyes as she did so, making brief work of answers to inquiries, and showing herself altogether disappointingly the old Cilly. Robert's absence was also a disappointment to Honor, though she satisfied herself that it was out of consideration.

Lucy would not go up to her room till bed-time ; and when Honor, accompanying her thither, asked tender and anxious questions about her health, she answered them, not indeed petulantly, as of old, but with a strange, absent manner, as if it were duty alone that made her speak. Only when Honor spoke of her again seeing the physician whom she had consulted, she at first sharply refused, then, as if recollecting herself, meekly said : ' As you think fit, but I had rather it was not the same.'

' I thought he was your own preference,' said Honor, ' otherwise I should have preferred Dr. F.'

' Very well, let it be,' said Lucy, hastily.

The good-nights, the kisses past, and Honor went away, with a heavy load of thwarted hopes and baffled yearning at her heart—yearnings which could be stilled only in one way.

A knock. She started up, and called ' Come in,' and a small, white, ghostly figure glided in, the hands tightly clasped together.'

' Lucy, dear child, you are ill !'

' I don't know what is the matter with me,' said a husky, stifled voice ; ' I meant it—I wanted it. I longed after it when it was out of reach, but now—'

' What, my dear ?' asked Honor, appalled at the effort with which she spoke.

' Your pardon !' and with a pressure of hands and contraction of the brow as of physical agony, she exclaimed, ' Honor, Honor, forgive me !'

Honor held out her arms, she flung herself prone

into them, and wept. Tears were with her an affection as violent as rare, and her sobs were fearful, heaving her little fragile frame as though they would rend it, and issuing in short cries and gasps of anguish. Honor held her in her arms all the time, much alarmed, but soothing and caressing, and in the midst, Lucilla had not lost all self-control, and though unable to prevent the paroxysm, restrained it as much as possible, and never attempted to speak ; but when her friend laid her down, her whole person still quivering with the long swell of the last uncontrollable sobbing, she looked up with the sweetest smile ever seen by Honor, who could not help thinking that such a sight might have met the eyes of the mother who found the devil gone out and her daughter laid on the bed.

The peace was such that neither could bear to speak for many seconds. At last Lucy said, ‘ Dear Honor !’

‘ My dearest.’

‘ Lie down by me ; please put your arms round me. There ! Oh ! it is so comfortable. Why did I never find it out before ? I wish I could be a little child, and begin again from the time my father made me over to you.’

‘ Ah ! Lucy, we all would begin again if we could. I have come to the perception how often I exasperated you.’

‘ An angel who did his duty by me would have exasperated me in your place.’

‘ Yes, that was one error of mine. I thrust myself in against the wishes of your nearest relative.’

‘ My thanklessness has made you feel that.’

‘ Don’t talk on, dear one—you are exhausting yourself.’

‘ A little more I must say before I can sleep under your roof in peace, then I will obey you in all things. Honor, these few years have shown me what your education did for me against my will. What would have become of me if I had been left to the poor Castle

Blanch people? Nothing could have saved me but my spirit of contradiction! No; all that saved my father's teaching from dying out in me—all that kept me at my worst from the Charteris standard, all that has served me in my recent life, was what you did for me! There! I have told you only the truth.'

Honor could only kiss her, and whisper something of unlooked-for happiness, and Lucilla's tears flowed again at the tenderness for which she had learnt to hunger; but it was a gentle shower this time, and she let herself be hushed into calmness, till she slept peacefully on Honor's bed, in Honor's arms, as she had never done, even as a young child. Honor watched her long, in quiet gladness and thankfulness, then likewise slept; and when awakened at last by a suppressed cough, looked up to see the two stars of blue eyes, soft and gentle under their swollen lids, gazing on her full of affection.

'I have wakened you,' Lucy said.

'Have you been awake long?'

'Not very; but to lie and look at the old windows, and smell the cedar fragrance, and see you, is better than sleep.'

Still the low morning cough and the pallor of the face filled Honor with anxiety; and though Lucilla attributed much to the night's agitation, she was thoroughly languid and unhinged, and fain to lie on the sofa in the cedar parlour, owning that no one but a governess could know the full charm of doing nothing.

The physician was the same who had been consulted by her father, and well remembered the flax-haired child whom he had so cruelly detached from his side. He declared her to be in much the same reduced and enfeebled condition as that in which her father had brought on his malady by reckless neglect and exposure, and though he found no positive disease in progress, he considered that all would depend upon

anxious care, and complete rest for the autumn and winter, and he thought her constitution far too delicate for governess life, positively forbidding her going back to her situation for another day.

Honor had left the room with him. She found Lucilla with her face hidden in the sofa cushions, but the next moment met a tremulous half spasmodic smile.

‘Am I humbled enough?’ she said. ‘Failed, failed, failed! One by my flirting, two by my temper, three by my health! I can’t get my own living, and necessity sends me home, without the grace of voluntary submission.’

‘Nay, my child, the very calling it home shows that it need not humble you to return.’

‘It is very odd that I should like it so much!’ said Lucy; ‘and now,’ turning away as usual from sentiment, ‘what shall I say to Mrs. Bostock? What a wretch she will think me! I must go over and see all those children once more. I hope I shall have a worthy successor, poor little rogues. I must rouse myself to write!’

‘Not yet, my dear.’

‘Not while you can sit and talk. I have so much to hear of at home! I have never inquired after Mr. Henderson! Not dead?’

‘You have not heard? It was a very long, gradual decay. He died on the 12th.’

‘Indeed! He was a kind old man, and home will not be itself without his white head in the reading-desk. Have you filled up the living?’

‘I have offered it—and there was a pause—to Robert Fulmort.’

‘I thought so! He wont have it.’

Honor durst not ask the grounds of this prediction, and the rest of that family were discussed. It was embarrassing to be asked about the reports of last winter, and Lucy’s keen penetration soon led to full confidence.

‘Ah! I was sure that a great flood had passed over that poor child! I was desperate when I wrote to Phœbe, for it seemed incredible that it should be either of the others, but I might have trusted her. I wonder what will become of her. I have not yet seen the man good enough for her.’

‘I have seen one—and so have you—but I could not have spared him to her, even if she had been in his time.’

Truly Lucilla was taken home when Honor was moved to speak thus.

For her sake Honor had regretted that the return dinner to the Albury-street household and the brothers was for this day, but she revived towards evening, and joined the party, looking far less pretty and piquante, and her dress so quiet as to be only just appropriate, but still a fair bright object, and fitting so naturally into her old place, that Lady Bannerman was scandalized at her presumption and Miss Charlecote’s weakness. Honor and Phœbe both watched the greeting between her and Robert, but could infer nothing, either from it, or from their deportment at dinner, both were so entirely unembarrassed and easy. Afterwards Robert sought out Phœbe, and beguiled her into the window where his affairs had so often been canvassed.

‘Phœbe,’ he said, ‘I must do what I fear will distress you, and I want to prepare you.’

Was it coming? But how could he have guessed that she had rather not?

‘I feel deeply your present homeless condition. I wish earnestly that I could make a home for you. But, Phœbe, once you told me you were content to be sacrificed to my foremost duty——’

‘I am,’ she said.

‘Well, then, I love this smoky old black wife] of mine, and don’t want to leave her even for my sisters.’

‘I never thought of your leaving her for your sisters, but——’ and as Lucilla’s music effectually veiled

all words—‘I had thought that there might be other considerations.’ Her eyes spoke the rest.

‘I thought you knew that folly had passed away,’ he said, somewhat sternly. ‘I trust that no one else has thought of it!’ and he indicated Miss Charlecote.

‘Not when the offer was made to you, but since she heard of my mission.’

‘Then I am glad that on other grounds my mind was made up. No,’ after a pause, ‘there is a great change. She is far superior to what she was in the days of my madness, but it is over, and never could be renewed. She herself does not desire it.’

Phœbe was called to the piano, not sorry that such should be Robert’s conviction, and glad that he should not be disturbed in work that suited him so well as did St. Matthew’s, but thinking him far too valuable for Lucy not to suffer in losing her power over him.

And did she ?

She was alone in the cedar parlour with Honor the next day, when the note was brought in announcing his refusal on the ground that while he found his strength and health equal to the calls of his present cure, and his connexion with the Fulmort firm gave him unusual facilities in dealing with the workmen, he did not think he ought to resign his charge for another for which many better men might be found.

‘Quite right ; I knew it,’ said Lucilla, when Honor had with some attempt at preparation shown her the note.

‘How could you know it ?’

‘Because I saw a man in his vocation.’

A long silence, during which Cilly caught a pitying glance.

‘Please to put that out of your head!’ she exclaimed. ‘There’s no pity, no ill-usage in the case. I wilfully did what I was warned that he would not bear, and there was an end of it.’

‘I had hoped not past recal.’

‘Well, if you will have the truth, when it was done and not to be helped, we were both very sorry ; I can answer at least for one, but he had bound himself heart and soul to his work, and does not care any longer for me. What, you, the preacher of sacrifice, wishing to see your best pupil throw up your pet work for the sake of a little trumpery crushed fire-fly ?’

‘Convict me out of my own mouth,’ said Honor, sadly, ‘it will not make me like to see my fire-fly crushed.’

‘When the poor fire-fly has lit the lamp of learning for six idle children, no other cause for dimness need be sought. No, I was well and wicked in the height of the pain, and long after it wore out—for wear out it did—and I am glad he is too wise to set it going again. I don’t like emotions. I only want to be let alone. Besides, he has got into such a region of goodness, that his wife ought to be super-excellent. I know no one good enough for him unless you would have him!’

As usual, Honor was balked of bestowing sympathy, and could only wonder whether this were reserve, levity, or resignation, and if she must accept it as a fact that in the one the attachment had been lost in the duties of his calling, in the other had died out for want of requital. For the present, in spite of herself, her feeling towards Robert verged more on distant, rather piqued admiration than on affection, although he nearly approached the ideal of her own first love, and Owen Sandbrook’s teaching was, through her, bearing good fruit in him, even while recoiling on her woman’s heart through Owen’s daughter.

Mervyn was easily reconciled to the decision, not only because his brother was even more valuable to him in London than in the country, but because Miss Charlecote’s next alternative was Charlecote Raymond, Sir John’s second son, a fine, open-tempered young man of thirty, who had made proof of vigour and judgment in the curacy that he had just left, and who had the farther recommendation of bearing the name of the

former squire, his godfather. Anything called Raymond was at present so welcome to Mervyn that he felt himself under absolute obligations to Robert for having left the field clear. When no longer prejudiced, the sight of Robert's practical labours struck him more and more, and his attachment grew with his admiration.

'I'll tell you what, Phœbe,' he said, when riding with her, 'I have a notion of pleasing the parson. Yesterday we got obstructed by an interminable procession of school children going out for a lark in the country by an excursion train, and he began envying their keepers for being able to give them such a bath of country air. Could we not let him do the same by his lot at Beauchamp?'

'Oh, Mervyn, what a mass of happiness you would produce!'

'Mass of humbug! I only want to please Robin and have no trouble. I shan't come near it. You only tell me what it will cost, carriage, provender, and all, and let me hear no more of it.'

He was destined to hear a good deal more. The proposal caused the utmost gratitude and satisfaction, except that Honor and Robert doubted whether it were a proper moment for merry-making at Hiltonbury. They were in full consultation when in walked Sir John Raymond, who could not help coming to town at once to express his thanks at having his son settled so near him. Ere long, he learnt what was under discussion, and made the amendment that the place should be the Forest, the occasion the horticultural show. He knew of a capital spot for the whole troop to dine in, even including the Wulstonians proper, whom Honor, wondering she had never thought of it before, begged to include in the treat at her own expense. But conveyance from the station for nearly two thousand?

'Never mind,' said Sir John; 'I'll undertake for that! We'll make it a county concern, and get the

farmers to lend their wagons, borrow all the breaks we can, and I know of some old stage-coaches in dock. If there's not room for all, they must ride and tye. It is only three miles from the little Forest station, and we'll make the train stop there. Only, young ladies, you must work Whittington's cat upon all the banners for your kittens.'

Lucilla clapped her hands, and undertook that the Whittingtonians should be marshalled under such an array of banners as never were seen before. Maria was in ecstasies, and Bertha was, in the excitement, forgetting her dread of confronting the county.

'But where's Miss Phœbe?' asked Sir John, who had sat half an hour waiting in vain for her to appear; and when he heard, he declared his intention of calling on her. And where was Mervyn himself? He was at the office, whither Robert offered to conduct the Baronet, and where Mervyn heard more of his proposal than he had bargained for; though, perhaps, not more than he liked. He was going to an evening party at the Bannermans', and seeing Sir John's inclination to see Phœbe, proposed to call for him and take him there.

'What is the use, Phœbe,' demanded Lady Banner-man, after the party was over, 'of my getting all these young men on purpose to dance with you, if you get up in a corner all the evening to talk to nobody but Mervyn and old Sir John? It can be nothing but perverseness, for you are not a bit shy, and you are looking as delighted as possible to have put me out.'

'Not to have put you out, Augusta, but I am delighted.'

'Well, at what?'

'We are asked to stay at Moorcroft, that's one thing.'

'Stupid place. No wines, no dinners,' said Augusta; 'and so ridiculous as you are! If the son is at home you'll do nothing but talk to Sir John. And if ever a girl ought to get married off I am sure it is you.'

'How do you know what good use I may make of my opportunities?'

Phœbe positively danced upstairs, and indulged in a private polka round her bed-room. She had been told not only of the Forest plan, but that Sir John was going to 'run down' to his brother's at Sutton the next day, and that he had asked Mervyn to come with him.

Mervyn had not this time promised to send her a blank cover. He thought he had very little present hope, for the talk had been of a year's probation—of his showing himself a changed character, &c. And not only was this only half that space, but less than a month had been spent in England. This time he was not setting off as one about to confer a favour.

Phœbe heard no more for two days. At last, as she was finishing her toilette to go out with Augusta, a hasty knock came to her door, and Mervyn entreated to be let in. His face told more than his tongue could utter. He had little guessed the intensity of the happiness of which he had so long deprived himself, and Cecily's acceptance had filled him with a flood of bliss, tinctured, however, by the sense of his own unworthiness of her constant affection, and increasing compunction for what he had made her endure.

'I don't know how she could do it, or why she cared for such a miserable scamp, breaking her heart all this time !' he exclaimed.

'You will make up for it now.'

'I wish I may ; but, bless me, Phœbe, she is a perfect little nun, and what is she to do with a graceless dog like me ?'

'You will see,' said Phœbe, smiling.

'What do you think, then ?' he demanded, in some alarm. 'You know I can't take to the pious tack. Will nothing else satisfy her ?'

'You are not the same as you were. You don't know what will happen to you yet,' said Phœbe, playfully.

'The carriage is ready, ma'am ; my Lady is waiting,' said a warning voice.

‘I say,’ quoth Mervyn, intercepting her, ‘not a word to my Lady. It is all conditional, you understand—only that I may ask again, in a year, or some such infernal time, if I am I don’t know what—but they do, I suppose.’

‘Perhaps you will by that time. Dear Mervyn, I am sorry, but I must go, or Augusta will be coming here.’

He made a ludicrous gesture of shrinking horror, but still detained her to whisper, ‘You’ll meet her at Moorcroft; they will have her for the Forest to-do.’

Phœbe signed her extreme satisfaction, and ran away.

‘I am surprised at you, Phœbe ; you have kept me five minutes.’

‘Some young ladies do worse,’ said the Admiral, who was very fond of her ; ‘and her time was not lost. I never saw her look better.’

‘I don’t like such a pair of milkmaid’s cheeks, looking so ridiculously delighted, too,’ said Lady Bannerman, crossly. ‘Really, Phœbe, one would think you were but just come up from the country, and had never been to a concert before. Those stupid little white marabouts in your hair again, too !’

‘Well,’ said Sir Nicholas, ‘I take them as a compliment—Phœbe knows I think they become her.’

‘I don’t say they are amiss in themselves, but it is all obstinacy, because I desired her to buy that magnificent ruby bandeau ! How is any one to believe in her fortune if she dresses in that twopenny half-penny fashion ? I declare I have a great mind to leave her behind.’

Phœbe could almost have said ‘pray do,’ so much did she long to join the party in Woolstone Lane, where the only alloy was, that poor Maria’s incapacity for secrecy forbade her hearing the good news.

Miss Charlecote, likewise, was secretly a little scandalized at the facility with which the Raymonds had

consented to the match ; she thought Mervyn improved, but neither religious nor repentant, and could not think Cecily or her family justified in accepting him. Something of the kind became perceptible to Robert when they first talked over the matter together.

‘It may be so,’ he said, ‘but I really believe that Mervyn will be more susceptible of real repentance when he has imperceptibly been led to different habits and ways of thinking. In many cases, I have seen that the mind has to clear itself, and leave old things behind before it has the capacity of perceiving its errors.’

‘Repentance must precede amendment.’

‘*Some* repentance must, but even the sense of the inexpedience and inconvenience of evil habits may be the first step above them, and in time the power of genuine repentance may be attained.’

‘Still, glad as I am for all your sakes, I cannot understand it on Cecily’s part, or how a girl of her tone of mind can marry where there can as yet be no communion of the highest kind. You would be sorry to see Phœbe do so.’

‘Very sorry. It is no example, but there may be claims from the mere length of the attachment, which seems to mark her as the appointed instrument for his good. Besides, she has not fully accepted him ; and after such change as he has made, she might not have been justified in denying all encouragement.’

‘She did not seek such justification,’ said Honor, laughing, but surprised to find Robert thus lenient in his brother’s case, after having acted so stern a part in his own.



CHAPTER XIV.

Then Robin Hood took them both by the hands,
And danced about the oak tree,
For three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men we be.

Old Ballad.

THE case of the three sisters remained a difficulty. The Bannermans professed to have 'washed their hands of them,' their advice not being taken, and Mr. Crabbe could not think himself justified in letting them return to the protection that had so egregiously failed. Bertha was fretted by the uncertainty, and became nervous, and annoyed with Phœbe for not showing more distress—but going on from day to day in the confidence that matters would arrange themselves.

Phœbe, who had come of age during her foreign tour, had a long conference with her guardian when he put her property into her hands. The result was that she obtained his permission to inhabit with her sisters the Underwood, a sort of dowager-house belonging to Beauchamp, provided some elderly lady could be found to chaperon them—Miss Fennimore, if they preferred her.

Miss Fennimore was greatly touched with the earnestness of the united entreaties of her pupils, and though regretting the field of usefulness in which she had begun to work, could not resist the pleasure of keeping house with Phœbe, and resuming her studies with Bertha on safer ground. She could not, however, quit her employment without a half year's notice, and

when Mervyn went down for a day to Beauchamp, he found the Underwood in such a woful state of disrepair, that turn in as many masons, carpenters, and paperers as he would, there was no hope of its being habitable before Martinmas. Therefore the intermediate time must be spent in visiting, and though the head-quarters were at the Holt, the Raymonds of Moorcroft claimed the first month, and the promise of Cecily's presence allured Bertha thither, though the Fulmort mind had always imagined the house highly religious and dull. Little had she expected to find it ringing with the wild noise and nonsense of a joyous home party of all ages, full of freaks and frolics, laughter and merriment. Her ready wit would have made her shine brilliantly if her speech had been constantly at command, but she often broke down in the midst of a repartee, and was always in danger of suffering from over-excitement. Maria, too, needed much watching and tenderness. Every one was very kind to her, but not exactly knowing the boundary of her powers, the young people would sometimes have brought her into situations to which she was unequal, if Phœbe had not been constantly watching over her.

Between the two sisters, Phœbe's visit was no sinecure. She was always keeping a motherly eye and hand over one or the other, sometimes over both, and not unseldom incurring Bertha's resistance under the petulance of overwrought spirits, or anger at troublesome precautions. After Cecily's arrival, however, the task became easier. Cecily took Bertha off her hands, soothing and repressing those variable spirits, and making a wise and gentle use of the adoration that Bertha lavished on her, keeping her cousins in order, and obviating the fast and furious fun that was too great a change for girls brought up like the Fulmorts. Maria was safe whenever Cecily was in the room, and Phœbe was able to relax her care and enjoy herself doubly for feeling all the value of the future sister.

She thought Miss Charlecote and Lucilla both

looked worn and dispirited, when one day she rode with Sir John to see them and inspect the Underwood, as well as to make arrangements for the Forest Show. Poor Honora was seriously discomposed at having nothing to show there. It was the first time that the Holt had failed to shine in its produce, but old Brooks had allowed the whole country round to excel so palpably in all farm crops, and the gardener had taken things so easily in her absence, that everything was mediocre, and she was displeased and ashamed. Moreover, Brooks had controverted her strictest instructions against harbouring tenants of bad character; he had mismanaged the cattle, and his accounts were in confusion. He was a thoroughly faithful servant, but like Ponto and the pony, he had grown masterful with age. Honor found that her presiding eye had certainly done some good, since going away had made things so much worse, and she took Sir John with her to the study to consult him on her difficulties. Phœbe and Lucilla were left together.

‘I am afraid you are not much better,’ said Phœbe, looking at the languid fragile little being, and her depressed air.

‘Yes, I am,’ she answered, ‘in essentials—but, oh! Phœbe, if you could only teach me to get on with Honor.’

‘Oh,’ said Phœbe, with a tone of disappointment; ‘I hoped all was comfortable now.’

‘So it ought to be! I am a wretch that it is not; but somehow I get tired to death. I should like it to be my own fault, but with her I always have a sense of *fluffiness*. There is so much figurativeness and dreamy sentiment that one never gets to the firm, clear surface.’

‘I thought that her great charm,’ said Phœbe. ‘It is a pity to be so dull and unimaginative as I am.’

‘I like you best as you are! I know what to be at.’

‘Besides, her sensibility and poetry are a fund of happy youthfulness. Abroad, her enjoyment was multiplied,

because every place was full of associations, lighted up by her fancy.'

'Made unsubstantial by her fluff! No, I cannot like mutton with the wool on! It is a shame, though, good creature as she is! I only wanted to make out the philosophy of the wearied, worried condition that her conversation is so apt to bring on in me. I can't think it pure wickedness on my own part, for I esteem, and love, and venerate the good soul with all my heart. I say, Phœbe, were you never in an inward rage when she would say she would not *let* some fact be true, for the sake of some mythical, romantic figment? You smile. Own that you have felt it.'

'I have thought of Miss Fennimore's theory, that legends are more veritable exponents of human nature than bare facts.'

'Say it again, Phœbe. It sounds very grand! Whipped cream is a truer exponent of milk than cheese, especially when it tastes of soap-suds? Is that it?'

'It is a much prettier thing, and not near so hard and dry,' said Phœbe; 'but, you see, you are talking in figures after all.'

'The effect of example. Look here, my dear, the last generation was that of mediævalism, ecclesiology, chivalry, symbolism, whatever you may call it. Married women have worked out of it. It is the middle-aged maids that monopolize it. Ours is that of common sense.'

'I don't know that it is better or prettier,' said Phœbe.

'And it may be worse! But how are the two to live together, when there is no natural conformity—only undeserved benefits on one side, and gratitude on the other?'

'You will be more at ease when you are stronger and better,' said Phœbe. 'Your brother will make you feel more natural with her.'

'Don't talk of it, Phœbe. Think of the scene those two will get up! And the showing him that terrible

little Cockney, Hoeing, as the old woman calls him. If I could only break the neck of his h's before poor Owen hears them.'

'Miss Charlecote did say something of having him here, but she thought you were not strong enough.'

'Justly judged! I shall have enough of him by and bye, if I take him out to Canada. Once I used to think that would be deliverance; now it has become nothing but a gigantic trouble!'

'If you are really equal to it, you will not feel it so, when the time comes. Bertha was miserable at the thought of moving, till just when she had come to the right point, and then she grew eager for it.'

It was wonderful how much freshened Lucy was by this brief contact with Phœbe's clear, practical mind; but only for the time. Ever since her arrival at the Holt she had sadly flagged, though making every effort against her depression. There was something almost piteous in her obedience and submission. All the employments once pressed upon her and then spurned, were solicitously resumed; or if Honor remonstrated against them as over-fatiguing, were relinquished in the same spirit of resigned meekness. Her too visible desire to make an onerous atonement pressed with equal weight on both, and the essential want of sympathy rendered the confidences of the one mysteries to the other.

Honora was grieved that her child had only returned to pine and droop, charging much of her melancholy lassitude upon Robert, and waiting on her with solicitude and tenderness that were unhappily only an additional oppression; and all Lucilla's aversion to solitude did not prevent her friend's absence from being a relief. It was all that she could at present desire to be released from the effort of being companionable, and be able to indulge her languor without remark, her wayward appetite without causing distress, and her dejection without caresses, commiseration, or secret imputations on Robert.

Tidings came from Vancouver's land of her uncle's death by an accident. Long as it was since she had seen him, the loss was deeply felt. She better appreciated what his care of her father had been, and knew better what gratitude he deserved, and it was a sore disappointment that he should not live to see her prove her repentance for all her flightiness and self-will. Moreover, his death, without a son, would enable his nephew to alienate the family estate; and Lucy looked on this as direful shame and humiliation. Still there was something soothing in having a sorrow that could be shared with Miss Charlecote; and the tangible cause for depression and retirement was a positive comfort.

'Trouble' was the chief dread of her wearied spirit; and though she had exerted herself to devise and work the banners, she could not attempt being present at the grand Forest show, and marvelled to see Honor set off, with twice her years and more than twice her sorrows, yet full of the fresh eagerness of youthful anticipation, and youthful regrets at leaving her behind, and at having nothing to figure at the show!

But vegetables were not the order of that day, the most memorable the Forest had perhaps ever known, since six bold Lancastrian outlaws had there been hung, on the very knoll where the flag of England was always hoisted, superior to the flags of all the villages.

The country population and the exhibitors were all early in the field, and on the watch for the great feature of the day—the Londoners. What cheering rent the air as the first vehicle from the little Forest station appeared, an old stage-coach, clustered within and without by white bibs, tippets, and caps, blue frocks, and grave, demure faces, uncertain whether to be charmed or frightened at their elevation and reception, and almost dazzled by the bright sunshine and pure air, to their perception absolutely thin, though heavy laden with the scents of new-mown hay and trodden ferns.

The horses are stopped, down springs Mr. Parsons

from the box, releases the staid mistress from within, lifts or jumps down the twenty girls, and watches them form in well-accustomed file, their banner at their head, just pausing to be joined by the freight of a rattling omnibus, the very roof laden with the like little Puritan damsels. The conveyances turn back for another load, the procession is conducted slowly away, through the road lined by troops of country children, regarding the costume as the latest London fashion, and holding out many an eager gift of nose-gays of foxgloves, marigolds, southernwood, and white pinks. Meanwhile break, cart, fly, van, barouche, gig, cart, and wagon continue in turn to discharge successive loads, twenty children to each responsible keeper. White caps are over! Behold the parish school of St. Wulstan's. Here *is* fashion! Here are hats, polkas, and full short skirts, but pale faces and small limbs. The country mothers cry 'Oh!' and 'Poor little dears, they look very tuly,' and complacently regard their own sturdy, sunburnt offspring, at whose staring eyes and ponderous boots the city mice glance with disdain.

Endless stream! Here waves a proud blue banner, wrought with a noble tortoiseshell cat; and behind it, each class led by a cat-flag, marches the Whittingtonian line, for once no ragged regiment, but arrayed by their incumbent's three sisters in lilac cotton and straw bonnets, not concealing, however, the pinched and squalid looks of the denizens of the over-crowded lanes and alleys.

That complaint cannot be made of these sixteen wearers of grey frocks and checked jackets. Stunted indeed they are, several with the expressionless, almost featureless, visages of hereditary misery, others with fearfully refined loveliness, but all are plump, well-fed, and at ease. They come from the orphanage of St. Matthew's, under the charge of the two ladies who walk with them, leading two lesser younglings, all but too small to be brought to the festival. Yes, these are the waifs and strays, of home and parents absolutely

unknown, whom Robert Fulmort has gathered from the streets—his most hopeful conquest from the realm of darkness.

Here, all neatly, some stylishly dressed, are the St. Wulstan's Young Women's Association, girls from fifteen upwards, who earn their own livelihood in service or by their handiwork, but meet on Sunday afternoons to read, sing, and go to church together, have books lent out for the week, or questions set for those who like them. It is Miss Fennimore who is the nucleus of the band; she sits with them in church, she keeps the books, writes the questions, and leads the singing; and she is walking between her two chief friends, answering their eager and intelligent questions about trees and flowers, and directing their observation.

Boys! boys! boys! Objects in flat caps and little round buttons atop, knee-breeches, and short-tailed coats, funnier to look at than their white-capped sisters, gentlemanly choristers, tidy sons of artisans and ware-housemen, ragged half-tamed little street vagabonds, all file past, under curate, schoolmaster, or pupil teacher, till the whole multitude is safely deposited in a large mead running into the heart of the forest, and belonging to the ranger, Sir John Raymond, who has been busy there, with all his family, for the last three days.

Policemen guard the gates from intruders, but all can look over the low hedge at the tents at either end, the cord dividing boy from girl, and the scattered hay, on which the strangers move about, mostly mazed by the strange sights, sounds, and smells, and only the petted orphans venturing to tumble about that curious article upon the ground. Two little sisters, however, evidently transplanted country children, sit up in a corner where they have found some flowers, fondling them and lugging them with ecstasy.

The band strikes up, and, at the appointed signal, grace is said by the archdeacon from the centre, the children are seated on the grass, and 'the nobility,

clergy, and gentry' rush to the tents, and emerge with baskets of sandwiches of the largest dimensions, or cans full of Sir John's beer. The Whittingtonians devour as those that have eaten nothing this morning, the Wulstonites as though country air gave great keenness of appetite ; the subdued silence of awe passes off, and voices, laughing, and play begin to betray some real enjoyment and familiarity.

Such as are not too perfectly happy in the revelry of tumbling on the grass are then paraded through the show, to gaze at peas, currants, and potatoes, pyramids of geraniums, and roses peeping through white paper. Thence the younger ones return to play in the field ; such of the elder ones as prefer walking are conducted through forest paths to gather flowers, and to obtain a closer view of that oft-described sight, a corn-field. Some of the elder Wulstonians get up a dance, tall girls dancing together with the utmost enjoyment ; but at four o'clock the band plays *Dulce Domum*, the captains of twenties count heads and hunt up stragglers, all gather together in their places, plum buns and tea are administered till even these thirsty souls can drink no more. Again the files are marshalled, the banners displayed, and the procession moves towards the little Forest church, a small, low-walled, high-roofed building, enclosed by stately beeches, making a sort of outer cathedral around the little elevation where it stood in its railed-in churchyard.

Two thousand children besides spectators in a building meant for three hundred ! How came it to be devised ? There is a consultation among the clergy. They go from one portion to another of the well-generalled army, and each division takes up a position on the ground strewn with dry beech leaves ; hassocks and mats are brought to the ladies, a desk set at the gate, and a chair for the archdeacon ; the choristers are brought near, and the short out-door service is begun.

How glorious and full the responses, 'as the voice of many waters,' and the chanted Psalms, the beautiful

songs of degrees of the 27th of the month, rise with new fulness and vividness of meaning among the tall trees and sunlit foliage. One lesson alone is read, in Charlecote Raymond's fine, powerful voice, and many an eye is filled with tears at the words, 'One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all,' as he gazes on the troops on troops of young and old, rich and poor, strangers and homeborn, all held together in that great unity, typified by the overshadowing sky, and evidenced by the burst of the Creed from every voice and every heart.

Then follow the Versicles, the Collects, the Thanksgiving, and the Blessing, and in a few warm, kind words the archdeacon calls on all to keep the bond of peace and brotherly love, and bade the strangers bear home with them the thought of the wonderful works of God. Then—

All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,

arises from the congregation in all its simple exultant majesty, forcing, as it were, every voice to break forth into singing, unless it be choked by heart-swelling.

The last note has died away, but there is a sweet hush, as though lingering still, ere breaking the sense that this is none other than the gate of heaven.

Rattle and rumble, the vehicles are coming! The children rise, and somewhere begins the indispensable cheer. The gentlemen take the lead. 'Three times three for Mr. Fulmort!' 'Three cheers for Sir John Raymond!' 'Three for the Forest show!' Shouting and waving of hats will never cease, the gentlemen are as crazy as the boys, and what will become of the train?

Tumble them in—hoist up the girls while mankind is still vociferous. What's all this, coming in at the omnibus windows? Stand back, child, you don't want to be set down in London! Your nosegay, is it? Here are the prize nosegays, prize potatoes, prize

currants, prize everything showering in on the Londoners to display or feast on at home. Many a family will have a first taste of fresh country green meat to-morrow; of such freshness, that is, as it may retain after eight hours of show and five of train. But all is compared! How the little girls hug their flowers. If any nosegays reach London alive, they will be cherished to their last hour, and may be the leaves will live in prayer-books for many a year.

Poor little things! It has been to them apparently a rather weary and oppressive pleasure, too strange for the most part to be thoroughly enjoyed; but it will live in their memories for many a day, and as time goes on, will clear itself from the bewilderment, till it become one of the precious days that make gems on the thread of life.

Mervyn! Where has he been all this time? True, he once said he would see nothing of it, and seems to have kept his word. He did not even acknowledge the cheers for Mr. Fulmort!

Is not something visible behind the broad smooth bole of yonder beech tree? Have Mervyn and Cecily been there all the time of the evening service?

It is a remarkable fact, that though nobody has told anybody, every person who is curious, and many who are not, know who is to be Mrs. Fulmort of Beauchamp.



CHAPTER XV.

When will you marry?
Say the bells of St. Mary.
When I get rich,
Say the bells of Shoreditch.
When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.
I do not know,
Says the great bell of Bow.

Nursery Rhyme.



HERE was some truth in Lucilla's view of herself and Honor as belonging to two distinct classes of development. Honor had grown up among those who fed on Scott, Wordsworth, and Fouqué, took their theology from the *British*

Critic, and their taste from Pugin; and moulded their opinions and practice on the past. Lucilla and Phœbe were essentially of the new generation, that of Kingsley, Tennyson, Ruskin, and the *Saturday Review*. Chivalry had given way to common sense, romance to realism, respect for antiquity to pitying patronage, the past to the future. Perhaps the present has lost in reverence and refinement as much as it has gained in clearness and confidence! Lucilla represented reaction, therefore her attitude was antagonistic; Phœbe was the child of the newer system, therefore she loved the elder one, and sought out the likenesses to, rather than the differences from, her own tone of thought. And well was it that she had never let slip her hold on that broad, unchanging thread of truth, the same through all changes, making faith and principle one, though the developments in practice and shades of thought

shake off the essential wisdom on which it grew, only to adopt some more fatal aberration of their own !

Thus standing between the two, Phœbe was a great help to both in understanding each other, and they were far more at ease when she was with them. In October, all three went to Woolstone Lane for a brief stay. Honor wished that the physician should see Lucilla before the winter, and Phœbe was glad to avail herself of the opportunity of choosing furniture and hiring servants for her new establishment, free from the interference of Lady Bannerman, who was of course at Brighton.

She had been obliged to let her sisters go to Sutton without her, as the little Parsonage had not room for three guests besides Lieschen, who was more indispensable to Maria than even herself, and both the others were earnestly set upon accepting the invitation. Cecily silenced her scruples by begging, as a proof of acceptance as a sister, that she might be entrusted with them, and promising that in her own quiet home, whence most of the family had been launched into life, they should meet with none of the excitements of merry Moorcroft ; and Phœbe was obliged to resign her charge for these few weeks, and trust from Bertha's lively letters that all was well.

Another cause which made Honor and Lucy anxious to be in London was the possibility of Owen's arrival. He had last been heard of on the shores of Lake Superior, when he spoke of returning as soon as the survey for a new line of railway should have been completed, and it was not unlikely that he might come even before his letter. News would await him that he would regret as much as did his sister. Uncle Kit's death had enabled Charles Charteris, or rather his creditors, to advertise Castle Blanch for sale, and Lucilla, who had a more genuine affection for the place than had any of the natives, grieved extremely over the family disgrace that was causing it to pass into other hands.

She had an earnest desire to take advantage of the

display of the house and grounds to pay the scenes of her youth one last visit. The vehemence of this wish was her first recurrence to her old strength of will, and Honora beheld it as a symptom of recovery, though dreading the long and fatiguing day of emotion. Yet it might be taken as another token of improvement that she had ceased from that instinctive caution of feebleness which had made her shrink from all exertion or agitation.

Her chest was pronounced to be in a satisfactory state, her health greatly improved ; and as there was no longer need for extra precaution, the three ladies set forth together on the first fine day.

The Indian summer was in full glory, every wood arrayed in brightness ; and as they drove from the Wrapworth Station, the banks of the river were surpassingly lovely, brown, red, and olive, illuminated by sprays of yellow, like fireworks, and contrasting with the vivid green of the meadows and dark blue water. Honor recollected the fairy boat that once had floated there, and glancing at the pale girl beside her, could not but own the truth of the similitude of the crushed fire-fly ; yet the fire of those days had scorched, not lighted ; and it had been the mirth that tendeth to heaviness.

Cilla was gazing, with all her soul in her eyes, in silence. She was trying to revive the sense of home that once had made her heart bound at the first glimpse of Wrapworth ; but her spirit leapt up no more. The familiar scene only impressed the sense of homelessness, and of the severance of the last tie to her father's parish, her mother's native place. Honor asked if she would stop in the village. 'Not yet,' she said ; 'let us have the Castle first.'

At the next turn they overtook Mr. Prendergast, and he was instantly at the carriage-door, exacting a willing promise of taking luncheon with him on the way back, a rest for which Honor was thankful, sure as she was that this visit was costing Lucy more than she had anticipated.

Without a word, she beheld the green space of park, scattered with groups of glowing trees, the elms spangled with gold, the maples blushing themselves away, the parterre, a gorgeous patchwork of scarlet, lilac, and orange, the Virginian creeper hanging a crimson mantle on the cloister. There was something inexpressibly painful in the sight of all this beauty, unheeded and cast away by the owners, and displayed as a matter of bargain and sale. Phœbe thought of the strange, uncomfortable dream that it had been to her when she had before looked and wondered at the scene before her. She retraced Robert's restless form in every window, and thought how little she had then augured the fruit of what he had suffered.

The rooms were opened, and set out for inspection. Honor and Phœbe made it their duty to occupy the chattering maid, a stranger to Lucilla, and leave her free to move through the apartments, silent and very white, as if it were a sacred duty to stand wherever she had stood, to gaze at whatever her eyes had once met.

Presently she stood still, in the dining-room, her hand grasping the back of a chair, as she looked up to a large picture of three children, two boys and a girl, fancifully dressed, and playing with flowers. The waxen complexion, fair hair, and blue eyes of the girl were almost her own.

'This to be sold?' she said, turning round, and speaking for the first time.

'O yes, ma'am!—everything, unreservedly. That picture has been much admired—by the late Sir Thomas Lawrence, ma'am—the children of the late General Sir Christopher Charteris.'

Lucilla, whiter than before, walked quickly away. In a few seconds Phœbe followed, and found her leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, her breathing heavily oppressed; but she smiled coldly and sternly, and tightened a stiff, cold grasp on Phœbe's arm, as she said—

'Honor has her revenge, Phœbe! These are the

kindred for whom I broke from her ! Well, if Charles sells his birthright and his own father, I don't know how I can complain of his selling my mother !

‘But, Lucy, listen. Miss Charlecote was asking about the agent. I am sure she means to try to get it for you.’

‘I dare say. It is right that I should bear it !’

‘And the maid said that there had been a gentleman speaking about it, and trying to secure it. She thought he had written to Mr. Charteris about it.’

‘What gentleman ?’ and Lucy was ready to spring back to inquire.

‘Miss Charlecote asked, and I believe it was Mr. Prendergast !’

There was a bright, though strange flickering of pleasure and pain over Cilla's face, and her eyelids quivered as she said, ‘Yes—yes—of course ; but he must not—he must not do it ! He cannot afford it ! I cannot let him !’

‘Perhaps your cousin only needed to be reminded.’

‘I have no hope of him. Besides, he cannot help himself ; but at least—I say, Phœbe, tell Honor that it is kindness itself in her ; but I can't talk about it to her——’

And Lucilla's steps sprang up-stairs, as desirous to escape the sight and speech of all.

After the melancholy round of deserted bedrooms, full of bitter recollections, Lucilla again descended first, and at the door met the curate. After a few words, she turned, and said, ‘Mr. Prendergast would row us down to the Vicarage, if you liked.’

‘Indeed, my dear,’ said Honor, unwillingly, ‘I am afraid of the cold on the water for you.’

‘Then pray let me walk across the Park !’ she said, imploringly ; and Miss Charlecote yielded rather than try her submission too severely, though dreading her over-fatigue, and set off with Phœbe in the fly.

‘You are sure it is not too far for you ?’ asked the curate.

‘Quite. You know I always used to fly upon Wrapworth turf.’ After some silence—‘I know what you have been doing,’ she said, with a choking voice.

‘About the picture? I am sorry you do.’

‘Why?’

‘It is of no use for you to know that your cousin has no more heart than a lettuce run to seed.’

‘When I knew that before, why may I not know that there are others not in the same case,’ she said, with full heart and eyes.

‘Because the sale must take place, and the purchaser may be a brute, so it may end in disappointment.’

‘It can’t end in disappointment.’

‘It may be far beyond my means,’ continued the curate, as if he had been answering her importunities for a new doll.

‘That I know it is,’ she said. ‘If it can be done at all, the doing it may be left to Miss Charlecote—it is an expiation I owe to her generous spirit.’

‘You would rather she did it than I?’ he asked, mortified.

‘Nay—didn’t I tell you that I let her do it as an expiation. Does not that prove what it costs me?’

‘Then why not——’ he began.

‘Because,’ she interrupted, ‘in the first place, you have no idea of the price of Lawrence’s portraits; and, in the second, it is so natural that you should be kind to me that it costs even my proud spirit—just nothing at all’—and again she looked up to him with beamy, tearful eyes, and quivering, smiling lip.

‘What, it is still a bore to live with Miss Charlecote,’ cried he, in his rough eagerness.

‘Don’t use such words,’ she answered, smiling. ‘She is all kindness and forgiveness, and what can it be but my old vixen spirit that makes this hard to bear?’

‘Cilla!’ he said.

‘Well?’

‘Cilla!’

‘Well!’

‘I have a great mind to tell you why I came to Southminster.’

‘To look at a living?’

‘To look at you. If I had found you pining and oppressed, I had thought of asking if you could put up with your father’s old friend.’

She looked with eyes of wonder, drew her arm away, and stood still, partly bewildered. ‘You didn’t?’ she said, half in interrogation.

‘I saw my mistake; you were too young and gay. But, Cilla,’ he added, more tremulously, ‘if you do wish for a home——’

‘Don’t, don’t!’ she cried; ‘I can’t have you talk as if I only wanted a home!’

‘And indeed I have none as yet,’ he said. ‘But do you indeed mean that you could think of it?’—and he came nearer.

‘It! Nonsense! Of you?’ she vehemently exclaimed. ‘How could you think of anything else?’

‘Cilla,’ he said, in great agitation, ‘let me know what you are saying. Don’t drive me crazy when it is not in the nature of things you should mean it!’

‘Why not?’ asked Lucilla. ‘It is only too good for me.’

‘Is it true, then?’ he said, as he took both her hands in his. ‘Is it true that you understand me, and are willing to be—to be my own—darling charge!’

‘Oh, it would be such rest!’

It was as if the storm-tossed bird was folding its weary wing in perfect calm and confidence. Nor could he contain his sudden joy, but spoke incoherent words, and well nigh wept over her.

‘How did you come to think of it?’ exclaimed she, as, the first gush of feeling over, they walked on arm-in-arm.

‘I thought of it from the moment when I hoped I might be a resource, a comforter at least.’

‘Not before?’ was the rather odd question.

‘No. The place was forlorn enough without you ; but I was not such a fool as to think of a young beauty, and all that.’

‘*All that* meaning my wickedness,’ said Lucilla. ‘Tell me again. You always did like the sprite even when it was wicked, only you were too good and right-minded.’

‘Too old and too poor.’

‘She is old and poor now,’ said Cilla ; ‘worn out and washed out into a mere rag. And you like her the better?’

‘Not washed out!’ he said, as her countenance flushed into more than its wonted loveliness. ‘I used to wish you hadn’t such a face when those insolent fellows talked of you—but you will get up your looks again when I have the care of you. The first college living—there are some that can’t choose but drop before long ! The worst is, I am growing no younger !’

‘Ah ! but I am growing older !’ she cried, triumphantly. ‘All women from twenty-five to forty are of the same age as all men from thirty to fifty. We are of just the same standing, you see !’

‘Seventeen years between us !’

‘Nothing at all, as you will see when I put on my cap, and look staid.’

‘No, no ; I can’t spare all that yellow hair.’

‘Yellow indeed ! if you don’t know better what to call it, the sooner it is out of sight the better.’

‘Why, what do you call it ?’

‘Flaxen, to be sure—*blonde cendrée*, if you like it better—that is the colour of tow and ashes !’

She was like a playful kitten for the next quarter of a mile, her prettiest sauciness returning in the exuberant, confiding gladness with which she clung to the affection that at length satisfied her spirit ; but gravity came back to her as they entered the village.

‘Poor Wrapworth !’ she said, ‘you will soon pass to strangers ! It is strange to know that, yet to feel

the old days returning for which I have pined ever since we were carried away from home and Mr. Pendency.'

'Yes, nothing is wanting but that we could remain here.'

'Never mind! We will make a better Wrapworth for one another, free from the stains of my Castle Blanch errors and sorrows! I am even glad of the delay. I want a little time to be good with poor dear Honor, now that I have heart and spirit to be good.'

'And I grudge every week to her! I declare, Cilla, you make me wish evil to my neighbour.'

'Then follow my example, and be content with this present gladness.'

'Ha! ha! I wonder what they'll say at Southminster. Didn't I row them for using you so abominably? I have not been near them since!'

'More shame for you! Sarah is my best correspondent, and no one ever did me so much good as Mrs. Prendergast.'

'I didn't ask her to do you good!'

'You ought to have done so then; for I should not be the happy woman I am now if she had not done me good because she could not help it! I hope they won't take it to heart.'

'I hope they will!'

'What?'

'Turning you out?'

'Oh, I meant your throwing yourself away on a broken-down governess! There—let us have done with nonsense. Come in this way.'

It was through the churchyard, past the three graves, which were as trim as if Lucilla had daily tended them. 'Thank you,' she said; then gazed in silence, till with a sigh she exclaimed:—

'Poor Edna! Monument of my faults! What perverse determination of mine it was that laid her here!'

'It was your generous feeling.'

‘Do not miscall and embellish my perverse tyranny, as much to defy the Charterises as to do her justice. I am more ashamed now that I have the secret of your yielding!’ she added, with downcast eyes, yet a sudden smile at the end.

‘We will take that child home and bring him up,’ said Mr. Prendergast.

‘If his father wishes it, it will be right;’ not as if it were the pleasantest of charges. ‘Thank you,’ said Cilla. ‘Three o’clock! Poor Honor, she must be starving!’

‘What about her?’ stammered Mr. Prendergast, hanging back shyly. ‘Must she be told?’

‘Not now,’ said Lucilla, with all her alert readiness. ‘I will tell her to-night. You will come in the first day you can!’

‘To-morrow! Every possible day.’

Honor had truly been uneasy, fearing that Lucilla was walking, sitting down, or fasting imprudently; but the brilliant colour, the joyous eyes, and lively manner spoke wonderfully for the effects of native air. Mr. Prendergast had become more absent and awkward than ever, but his extra shyness passed unremarked, and Lucilla’s tact and grace supplied all deficiencies without obtrusiveness. Always at home in the vicarage, she made none of her former bantering display of familiarity, but only employed it quietly to secure the guests having what they wanted, and to awaken the host to his duties, when he forgot that any one save herself needed attention.

She was carried off before the river fog should arise, and her abstracted silence all the way home was not wondered at; although Phœbe, sitting opposite to her, was at a loss to read the furtive smiles that sometimes unclosed her lips, or the calm, pensive look of perfect satisfaction on her features; and Honor could not comprehend her entire absence of fatigue after so trying a day, and wondered whether it were really the old complaint—want of feeling.

At night, Honor came to her room, and began—
'My dear, I want to make a little explanation to you, if you are not tired.'

'Oh! no—I had a little explanation to make to you,' she answered, with a flush and a smile.

'Perhaps it may be on the same subject,' and as Cilla half laughed, and shook her head, she added—
'I meant to tell you that long ago—from the time I had the Holt—I resolved that what remained of my income after the duties of my property were fulfilled, should make a fund for you and Owen. It is not much, but I think you would like to have the option of anticipating a part, in case it should be possible to rescue that picture.'

'Dear, dear Honor,' exclaimed Cilla; 'how very kindly you are doing it! Little did I think that Charles's heartlessness would have brought me so much joy and kindness.'

'Then you would like it to be done,' said Honor, delighted to find that she had been able so to administer a benefit as to excite neither offence nor resignation. 'We will take care that the purchaser learns the circumstances, and he can hardly help letting you have it at a fair valuation.'

'Thanks, thanks, dear Honor,' repeated Lucy; 'and now for *my* explanation. Mr. Prendergast has asked me to marry him.'

Had it been herself, Honor could not have been more astounded.

'My child! impossible! Why, he might be your father! Is it that you want a home, Lucy? Can you not stay with me?'

'I can and I will for the present, sweetest Honey,' said Cilly, caressingly drawing her arm round her. 'I want to have been good and happy with you; but indeed, indeed I can't help his being more to me!'

'He is a very excellent man,' began bewildered Honor; 'but I cannot understand——'

'His oddity? That's the very thing which makes

him my own, and nobody else's, Mr. Pendy ! Listen, Honor. Sit down, you don't half know him, nor did I know my own heart till now. He came to us, you know, when my father's health began to break after my mother's death. He was quite young, only a deacon ; he lived in our house, and he was, with all his dear clumsiness, a daughter to my father, a nurse to us. I could tell you of such beautiful awkward tendernesses ! How he used to help me with my sums—and tie Owen's shoes, and mince his dinner for him—and spare my father all that was possible ! I am sure you know how we grieved after him.'

' Yes, but——'

' And now I know that it was *he* that I cared for at Wrapworth. With him I never was wild and naughty as I was with others, though I did not know—oh ! Honor, if I had but known—that he always cared for the horrid little thing I was, I could not have gone on so ; but he was too good and wise, even while he *did* love me, to think of *this*, till I had been tamed and come back to you ! I am sure I can't be so naughty now, since he has thought of me !'

' Lucy, dearest, I am glad to see you so happy, but it is very strange to me. It is such a sudden change,' said Honor.

' No change ! I never cared for any one half as much !'

' Lucy !' confounded at her apparent oblivion.

' It is true,' said Lucy, sitting down by her. ' Perhaps I thought I did, but if the other had ever been as much to me, I could never have used him as I did ! O, Honor, when a person is made of the stuff I am, it is very hard to tell which is one's heart, and which is one's flirting-machine ! for the other thing does simulate all the motions, and feel real true pain ! But I know now that Mr. Pendy was safe in my real heart of hearts all the time, though I never guessed it, and thought he was only a sort of father ; but you see that was why I was always in awe of getting under Robert's

dominion, and why I survived his turning me off, and didn't at all wish him to bring it on again.'

'No, that you did not,' said Honor, in a cheered voice, as if acquitting her.

'And I am sure if Mr. Prendergast only looked like using me after my deserts, as *he* did, it would not be only a demi-decline that I should get into,' said Lucilla, her eyes full of tears. 'Oh! Honor, think of his care of my father! Kiss me and wish me joy in my father's name, and like him; for when you know him, you will see he is the only person in the wide world to whom you could safely trust your little torment!'

Honor could not but be carried along to give the hearty kiss and motherly congratulation as they were sought, and she saw that she must believe what Lucy said of her own feelings, incomprehensible though they were. But she regretted to hear of the waiting for a college living, and at the first impulse wished she had heard of this attachment before Hiltonbury's fate had been fixed.

'For shame, Honor, as if you ought not to respect Hiltonbury too much to tack it to my petticoat! But at least thank you, for if you could once think of committing Hiltonbury to him, you must like it for me.'

'I must like what is so evidently well for you, my child! Will you tell Phœbe?'

'Not till we go home, I think,' said Cilla, with a blush; and, as if to avoid farther discussion, she bade Honora good night. Decidedly, she wished Robert to feel more than she would like to see, or should he betray no feeling, she had rather not be aware of it.

But such news was already in town as to put to flight, for a time at least, the last remnants of coquetry.

Robert was in the house early in the morning, and called Miss Charlecote to speak to him in the study. He had a packet of letters in his hand, of which he gave one to herself, a long one in Owen's writing, but unfinished and undirected.

Lakeville, Newcastle District, August 14th.

‘MY DEAR HONOR,

‘ There is no saying how much I rejoice that I can write to you and Lucy again under the same roof. I hope soon to see you together again, and revive old times, but we are delayed by the discovery that the swamp lying full in the Grand Ottawa and Superior Line is impracticable, and would not only be the death of all the navvies employed thereon, but would swallow bodily the funds of the G. O. and S. Company. So we are carrying our survey in other directions, before making out our report, after which I hope to be permanently engaged on the construction. This will give me three months to spend at home, in knitting up old links, and considering how to dispose of my poor little encumbrance till I can set him to make his way here. You or Lucy would perhaps look out for some lady who takes Indian children, or the like. I am my own man now, and can provide the wherewithal, for my personal expenses are small, and engineering is well paid. Lucy must not think of bringing him out, for even at her fastest the Far West would be no place for her. Let her think of Glendalough, and realize that if she were here she would look back on it as a temple of comfort, civilization, and civility, and this place is the last attempt at social habitation for 200 and odd miles. It stands on a lake of its own, with an Indian name, “which no man can speak and no man can spell.” It is colonial to the highest degree, and inhabited by all denominations, chiefly agreed in worshipping us as priests of the G. O. and S. Line, which is to make their fortune, and for their manners, least said soonest mended, though there are some happy exceptions, French Canadian, Lowland Scots, &c., and a wiry hard-working parson, whose parish extends nearly to Lake Superior, and whose remaining aroma of University is refreshing. There is also a very nice young lad, whose tale may be a moving example of what it is to come out here expecting to find in the backwoods.

Robinson Crusoe's life and that of the Last of the Mohicans combined. That is, it was not he, but his father, Major Randolph, an English officer, who, knowing nothing of farming, less of Canada, and least of all of speculation, got a grant of land, where he speculated only to lose, and got transferred to this forlorn tract, only to shiver with ague and die of swamp fever. During the twenty-five years of this long agony, he had contrived to have two wives, the first of whom left this son, whom he educated as a scholar, intending to finish him in England when the tide should turn, but whereas it never did, he must needs get a fresh partner into the whirlpool, a Yankee damsel out of a boarding-house. By the time she had had a couple of children, he died, and the whole weight remains bound about young Randolph's neck, tying him down to work for dear life in this doleful spot, without a farthing of capital, no stock, no anything. I came upon the clearing one day in the course of my surveying, and never did I see *Gone to the Dogs* more clearly written on any spot; the half-burnt or overthrown trees lying about overgrown with wild vines and raspberries, the snake fence broken down, the log-house looking as if a touch would upset it, and nothing hopeful but a couple of patches of maize and potatoes, and a great pumpkin climbing up a stump. My horse and myself were done up, so I halted, and was amazed at the greeting I received from the youth, who was hard at work on his hay, single-handed, except for the two children tumbling in it. The lady in her rocking-chair was contrast enough to make me heartily glad to find that she was his stepmother, not his wife. Since that, I have seen a good deal of him; he comes to Lakeville, five miles across the bush and seven across the lake to church on Sunday, and spends the day with the parson, and Mr. Currie has given him work in our press of business, and finds him so effective, that he wants to take him on for good; but this can't be while he has got these three stones about his neck, for whom

he works harder and lives worse than any day-labourer at Hiltonbury; regular hand to mouth, no chance of making a start, unless the Company will fortunately decide on the line I am drawing through the heart of his house, which will force them to buy him out of it. I go out to-morrow to mark the said line for Mr. Currie to report upon, and will finish my letter to travel with said report.'

'*Aug. 21st.*—Thanks to the Fire-King, he has done for the ancient log-house, though next time he mounts his "hot copper filly," I do not desire a second neck-and-neck race with him. A sprain of the leg, and contusion (or confusion) of the head, are the extent of the damage received, and you will say that is cheap, considering all things. I had done my 200 miles of marking, and was coming back on my last day's journey, debating whether to push on to Lakeville that night, camp out, or get a shake-down at Randolph's, bringing my own provender, for they live on hominy and milk, except for what he can shoot or catch. It was so dark that I had nearly fixed on sleeping in the bush, when it struck me that there must be an uncommonly fine aurora, but getting up a little rising ground where the trees were thinner, I observed it was to the south-west, not the north. That way there lies prairie land, at this season one ocean of dry bents, fit to burn like tinder, so that one spark would set fifty square miles alight at once. All the sky in that quarter was the colour of glowing copper, but the distance was so enormous that danger never occurred to me till I saw the deer scampering headlong, the birds awake and flying, and my horse trembling and wild to be off. Then I remembered that the wind was full from that direction, and not a bit of water between, nor all the way to the Lakeville lake. I never knew my beast's pace on the Kingston road what it was through that track, all the rustling and scuttling of the beasts and birds sounding round us, the glare gaining on us, and the scent of smoke beginning

to taint the wind. There was Randolph's clearing at last, lonesome and still as ever, and a light in the window. Never was it so hard to pull in a horse; however, I did so. He was still up, reading by a pine torch, and in five minutes more the woman and her children were upon the horse, making for the lake. Randolph took his axe, and pocketed a book or two, and we dashed off together for a long arm of swamp that he knew of, running out from the lake. When we got to the other end of the clearing, I thought it was all up with us. The wall of red roaring flame had reached the other side, and the flame was leaping from the top of one pine to another, making them one shape of quivering red, like Christmas evergreens in the fire, a huge tree perhaps standing up all black against the lurid light, another crashing down like thunder, the ribbon of flame darting up like a demon, the whole at once standing forth a sheet of blazing light. I verily believe I should have stood on, fascinated with the horror and majesty of the sight, and feeling it vain to try to escape, when the burning wings were spreading to enclose the clearing and us with it, but Randolph urged me on, and we plunged through the bush at the best speed we could make, the smoke rolling after us, and the heat glowing like a furnace, so as to consume all power out of us. It was hell itself pursuing after us, and roaring for his prey, the trees coming crashing down, and shaking the earth under our feet, the flame absolutely running on before us upon the dry grass and scrub, and the scorching withering every drop of moisture from us, though not ten minutes before, we had been streaming at every pore.

'I saw green reeds before us, heard Randolph cry out, "Thank God," and thought I was plunging after him, when I found myself on the ground, and the branches of a hemlock covering me. Happily they were but the lesser boughs, and not yet alight; and at his own desperate peril, Randolph came back with his

axe, and cut them off, then dragged me after him into the mud. Never bath more welcome! We had to dispute it with buffaloes, deer, all the beasts of the wood, tame and cowed with terror, and through them we floundered on, the cold of the water to our bodies making the burning atmosphere the more intolerable round our heads. At last we came to an island, where we fell upon the reeds so much spent that it was long before we found that our refuge was shared by a bear and by Randolph's old cow, to the infinite amaze of the bull-frogs. The Fire King was a hundred yards off, and a fierce shower, brought from other parts by his unwarrantable doings, began to descend, and finally quenched him in such smoke that we had to lie on our faces to avoid stifling. When the sun arose, there was Lakeville in its woods on one side, on the other the blackest desolation conceivable. The population were all astir. Mrs. Randolph had arrived safely, and Mr. Currie was about to set forth in search of my roasted remains, when they perceived the signals of distress that we were making, after Randolph had done gallant battle with the bear in defence of the old cow. He is a first-rate hunter, and despatched the fellow with such little aid as I could give, with a leg not fit to stand upon; and when the canoes came off to fetch us, he would not leave the place till he had skinned the beast. My leg is unserviceable at present, and all my bones feel the effect of the night in the swamp, so I am to lay by, make the drawings, and draw up the report, while Mr. Currie and Randolph do my work over again, all my marks having been effaced by his majesty the Fire King, and the clearing done to our hand. If I could only get rid of the intolerable parching and thirst, and the burning of my brains! I should not wonder if I were in for a touch of swamp fever.'

Here Owen's letter broke off, and Honor begged in alarm for what Robert evidently had in reserve. He had received this letter to her enclosed in one from

Mr. Currie, desiring him to inform poor young Sandbrook's friends of his state. By his account, Owen's delay and surrender of his horse had been an act of gallant self-devotion, placing him in frightfully imminent danger, whence only the cool readiness of young Randolph had brought him off, apparently with but slight hurts from the fall of the tree, and exposure to the night air of the heated swamp. He had been left at Lakeville in full confidence of restoration after a week's rest, but on returning from Lake Superior, Mr. Currie found him insensible, under what was at first taken for an aggravated access of the local fever, until, as consciousness returned, it became evident that the limbs on the left side were powerless. Between a litter and water transport, the sufferer was conveyed to Montreal, where the evil was traced to concussion of the brain from the blow from the tree, the more dangerous because unfelt at first, and increased by application to business. The injury of the head had deprived the limbs of motion and sensation, and the medical men thought the case hopeless, though likely to linger through many stages of feebleness of mind and body. Under these circumstances, Mr. Currie, being obliged to return home himself, and unable to leave the poor young man in such a condition among strangers, had decided on bringing him to England, according to his own most eager desire, as the doctors declared that the voyage could do no harm, and might be beneficial. Mr. Currie wrote from Quebec, where he had taken his passage by a steamer that would follow his letter in four days' time, and he begged Robert to write to him at Liverpool stating what should be done with the patient, should he be then alive. His mind, he said, was clear, but weak, and his memory, from the moment of his fall till nearly the present time, a blank. He had begged Mr. Currie to write to his sister or to Miss Charlecote, but the engineer had preferred to devolve the communication upon Mr. Fulmort. Of poor Owen he spoke with much

feeling, in high terms of commendation, saying that he was a valuable friend and companion as well as a very right hand in his business, and that his friends might be assured that he (Mr. Currie) would watch over him as if he were his own son, and that his temporary assistant, Mr. Randolph, was devoted to him, and had nursed him most tenderly from the first.

‘Four days’ time!’ said Honor, when she had taken in the sense of these appalling tidings. ‘We can be at Liverpool to meet him. Do not object, Robert. Nothing else will be bearable to either his sister or me.’

‘It was of his sister that I was thinking,’ said Robert. ‘Do you think her strong enough for the risks of a hurried journey, with perhaps a worse shock awaiting her when the steamer comes in? Will you let me go alone? I have sent orders to be telegraphed for as soon as the *Asia* is signalled, and if I go at once, I can either send for you if needful, or bring him to you. Will you not let me?’

He spoke with persuasive authority, and Honora half yielded. ‘It may be better,’ she said, ‘it *may*. A man may do more for him there than we could, but I do not know whether poor Lucy will let you, or—’ (as a sudden recollection recurred to her) ‘whether she ought.’

‘Poor Owen is my friend, my charge,’ said Robert.

‘I believe you are right, you kind Robin,’ said Honor. ‘The journey might be a great danger for Lucy, and if I went, I know she would not stay behind. But I still think she will insist on meeting him.’

‘I believe not,’ said Robert; ‘at least, if she regard submission as a duty.’

‘Oh, Robin, you do not know. Poor child, how am I to tell her?’

‘Would you like for me to do so?’ said Robert, in the quiet matter of course way of one to whom painful offices had become well-nigh natural.

‘You?’ O Robin, if you——’ she said, in some confusion, but at the moment the sound of the visitors’ bell startled her, and she was about to take measures for their exclusion, when looking from the window, she saw that the curate of Wrapworth had already been admitted into the court. The next moment she had met him in the hall, and seizing his hand, exclaimed in a hurried whisper, ‘I know! I know! But there is a terrible stroke hanging over my poor child. Come in and help us to tell her!’

She drew him into the study, and shut the door. The poor man’s sallowness had become almost livid, and in half-sobbing words he exclaimed—‘Is it so? Then give her to me at once. I will nurse her to the last, or save her! I knew it was only her being driven out to that miserable governess life that has been destroying her!’ and he quite glared upon poor innocent Honor as a murderess.

‘Mr. Prendergast, I do not know what you mean. Lucilla is nearly well again. It is only that we fear to give her some bad news of her brother.’

‘Her brother! Is that all?’ said the curate, in a tone of absolute satisfaction. ‘I beg your pardon, Miss Charlecote; I thought I saw a doctor here, and you were going to sentence my darling.’

‘You do see Robert Fulmort, whom I thought you knew.’

‘So I do,’ said Mr. Prendergast, holding out his hand. ‘I beg your pardon for having made such a fool of myself; but you see, since I came to an understanding with that dear child, I have not thought of anything else, nor known what I was about.’

Robert could not but look inquiringly at Miss Charlecote.

‘Yes,’ she faltered, ‘Mr. Prendergast has told you—what I could not—what I had not leave to say.’

‘Yes,’ put in Mr. Prendergast, in his overflowing felicity, ‘I see you think it a shocking match for such a little gem of beauty as that; but you young men

should have been sharper. There's no accounting for tastes ;' and he laughed awkwardly.

'I am heartily glad,' said Robert—and voice, look, and grasp of the hand conveyed the fullest earnestness—'I am exceedingly rejoiced that the dear little friend of all my life should be in such keeping ! I congratulate you most sincerely, Mr. Prendergast. I never saw any one so well able to appreciate her.'

That is over, thought Honor ; how well he has stood it ! And now she ventured to recal them to the subject in hand, which might well hang more heavily on her heart than the sister's fate ! It was agreed that Lucilla would bear the intelligence best from Mr. Prendergast, and that he could most easily restrain her desire for going to Liverpool. He offered himself to go to meet Owen, but Honor could not quite forgive the '*Is that all ?*' and Robert remained constant to his former view, that he, as friend both of Owen and Mr. Currie, would be the most effective. So therefore it stood, and Lucilla was called out of the drawing-room to Mr. Prendergast, as Honor and Robert entered it. It was almost in one burst that Phoebe learnt the brother's accident and the sister's engagement, and it took her several moments to disentangle two such extraordinary events.

'I am very glad,' repeated Robert, as he felt rather than saw that both ladies were regarding him with concealed anxiety ; 'it is by far the happiest and safest thing for her ! It is an infinite relief to my mind.'

'I can't but be glad,' said Honor ; 'but I don't know how to forgive her !'

'That I can do very easily,' said Robert, with a smile on his thin lips that was very reassuring, 'not only as a Christian, but as I believe nothing ever did me so much good. My fancy for her was an incentive which drew me on to get under better influences, and when we threw each other overboard, I could do without it. She has been my best friend, not even excepting you, Miss Charlecote ; and as such I hope always

to be allowed to regard her. There, Phœbe, you have had an exposition of my sentiments once for all, and I hope I may henceforth receive credit for sincerity.'

Miss Charlecote felt that, under the name of Phœbe, this last reproof was chiefly addressed to her; and perhaps Phœbe understood the same, for there was the slightest of all arch smiles about her full lip and down-cast eye; and though she said nothing, her complete faith in her brother's explanation, and her Christian forgiveness of Lucilla, did not quench a strong reserve of wondering indignation at the mixed preferences that had thus strangely settled down upon the old curate.

She followed her brother from the room, to ask whether she had better not leave Woolstone Lane in the present juncture. But there was nowhere for her to go; Beauchamp was shut up, the cottage being painted, Sutton barely held the three present guests, and her elder sister from home. 'You cannot go without making a disturbance,' said Robert; 'besides, I think you ought to stay with Miss Charlecote. Lucilla is of no use to her; and this unlucky Owen is more to her than all the world besides. You may comfort her.'

Phœbe had no more to urge. She could not tell her brother that looks and words of Owen Sandbrook, and in especial his last farewell, which she was at that time too young and simple to understand, had, with her greater experience, risen upon her in an aspect that made her desirous of avoiding him. But, besides the awkwardness of such recollections at all, they seemed cruel and selfish when the poor young man was coming home crippled and shattered, only to die, so she dismissed them entirely, and set herself to listen and sympathize.



CHAPTER XVI.

Old isle and glorious, I have heard
Thy fame across the sea,
And know my father's homes are thine,
My fathers rest with thee.

A Cleveland Lore.

R M. FULMORT to Miss Charlecote.—
'The carriage to meet the 6 P.M. train.'

That was all the intelligence that reached Woolstone Lane till the court-gates were opened, and Robert hurried in before the carriage. 'Much better,' he said, 'only he is sadly knocked up by the journey. Do not show yourselves till he is in his room. Which is it?'

Honora and Lucilla hastened to point it out, then drew back, and waited, Honor supporting herself against the wall, pale and breathless, Lucy hanging over the balusters, fevered with suspense. She heard the tread, the quick, muttered question and answer; she saw the heavy, helpless weight carried in; and as the steps came upwards, she was pulled back into the sitting-room by Honor, at first almost by force, then with passive, dejected submission, and held tight to the back of a chair, her lip between her teeth, as though withholding herself by force from springing forward as the familiar voice, weak, weary, and uncertain, met her ear.

At length Robert beckoned; and she flew at first,

then slackened her pace, awestruck. Her brother lay on the bed, with closed eyes. The form was larger, more manly and robust than what she had known, the powerful framework rendering the wreck more piteous, and the handsome dark beard and moustache, and crisp, thick curls of hair made the straight, well-cut features resemble an old picture of a cavalier; nor had the bright, sunburnt complexion lost the hue of health; so that the whole gave the idea of present suffering rather than abiding illness. He seemed to her like a stranger, till at her step he looked up, and his dark grey eyes were all himself as he held out his hand and fondly spoke her name. She hung over him, restraining her exclamations with strong force; and even in the midst of her embrace he was saying, 'Honor! Is Honor here?'

Trembling with emotion, Honor bent to kiss his brow, and felt his arm thrown about her neck, and the hairy lips kissing either cheek just as when, smooth and babyish, they had sought her motherly caress. 'May I come home?' he asked. 'They brought me without your leave!'

'And you could not feel sure of your Sweet Honey's welcome?'

He smiled his old smile of fondness, but dimmed by pain and languor; and the heavy lids sank over his eyes, but to be at once raised. 'Lucy! Home, Honor! It is all I wanted,' he said; 'if you will be good to me, such as I am.'

'We will sit close to you, my dear; only you cannot talk—you must rest.'

'Yes. My head is very bad—my eyes ache,' he said, turning his head from the light, with closed eyes, and hand over them; but then he added—'One thing first—where is he?'

'Your little boy?' said Lucilla. 'Do you wish to see him? I will call him.'

'No, no, I could not;' and his brow contracted with pain. 'No; but did not I tell you all about

him—your cousin, Honor? Do pull the curtain round, the light hurts me !’

Convinced that his mind was astray, there was no attempt at answering him ; and all were so entirely occupied with his comforts, that Phœbe saw and heard no one until Robert came down, telling her that Owen had, in fact, improved much on the voyage, but that the long day’s journey by train had brought on such severe and exhausting pain in the head, that he could scarcely speak or look up, and fatigue seemed to have confused the faculties that in the morning had been quite clear. Robert was obliged to go to his seven o’clock service, and Phœbe would fain have come with him, but he thought she might be useful at home.

‘Miss Charlecote is so much absorbed in Owen,’ he said, ‘that I do not think she heard a word about that young Randolph. Mr. Currie is gone to spend to-morrow and Sunday with his father at Birmingham, but he let me have this young man to help to bring Owen home. Make Miss Charlecote understand that he is to sleep at my place. I will come back for him, and he is not to be in her way. He is such a nice fellow ! And, Phœbe, I have no time, but there is Mrs. Murrell with the child in the study. Can you make her understand that Owen is far too ill to see them to-night ? Keep them off poor Lucy, that’s all.’

‘Lucy, that’s all !’ thought Phœbe, as she moved to obey. ‘In spite of all he says, Lucy will always be his first thought next to St. Matthew’s ; nor do I know why I should mind it, considering what a vast space there is between !’

‘Now my pa is come, shan’t I be a gentleman, and ride in a carriage ?’ were the sounds that greeted Phœbe’s ears as she opened the door of the study, and beheld the small, lean child dressed in all his best ; not one of the grey linen frocks that Lucilla was constantly making for him, but in a radiant tartan, of such huge pattern that his little tunic barely contained a sample of one of each portentous check, made up crosswise, so

as to give a most comical, harlequin effect to his spare limbs, and weird, black eyes. The disappointment that Phœbe had to inflict was severe, and unwittingly she was the messenger whom Mrs. Murrell was likely to regard with the most suspicion and dislike. 'Come home along with me, Hoing, my dear,' she said; 'you'll always find poor granny your friend, even if your pa's 'art is like the nether millstone, as it was to your poor ma, and as others may find it yet.'

'I have no doubt Mr. Sandbrook will see him when he is a little recovered after his journey,' said Phœbe.

'No doubt, ma'am. I don't make a doubt, so long as there is no one to put between them. I have 'eard how the sight of an 'opeful son was as balm to the eyes of his father; but if I could see Mr. Fulmort——'

'My brother is gone to church. It was he who sent me to you.'

Mrs. Murrell had real confidence in Robert, whose friendliness had long been proved, and it was less impossible to persuade her to leave the house when she learnt that it was by his wish; but Phœbe did not wonder at the dread with which an interview with her was universally regarded.

In returning from this mission, Phœbe encountered the stranger in the lamp-light of the hall, intently examining the balustrade of the stairs.

'This is the drawing-room,' she courteously said, seeing that he seemed not to know where to go.

'Thank you,' he said, following her. 'I was looking at the wood. What is it? We have none like it.'

'It is Irish bog oak, and much admired.'

'I suppose all English houses can scarcely be like this?' said he, looking round at the carved wainscot.

'Oh, no, this house is a curiosity. Part was built before 1500.'

'In the time of the Indians?' Then smiling, 'I had forgotten. It is hard to realize that I am where I have so long wished to be. Am I actually in a room 360 years old?'

‘No; this room is less ancient. Here is the date, 1605, on this panel.’

‘Then this is such a house as Milton might have grown up in. It looks on the Thames?’

‘How could you tell that?’

‘My father had a map of London that I knew by heart, and after we came under Temple Bar, I marked the bearings of the streets. Before that I was not clear. Perhaps there have been changes since 1830, the date of his map.’

Phœbe opened a map, and he eagerly traced his route, pronouncing the names of the historical localities with a relish that made her almost sorry for their present associations. She liked his looks. He seemed to be about two or three-and-twenty, tall and well-made, with somewhat of the bearing of his soldier-father, but broad-shouldered and athletic, as though his strength had been exercised in actual bodily labour. His clear, light hazel eye was candid and well-opened, with that peculiar prompt vigilance acquired by living in a wild country, both steady to observe and keen to keep watch. The dark chesnut hair covered a rather square brow, very fair, though the rest of the face was browned by sun and weather; the nose was straight and sensible, the chin short and firm; the lips, though somewhat compressed when shut, had a look of good humour and cheerful intelligence peculiarly pleasant to behold. Altogether, it was a face that inspired trust.

Presently the entrance of the tea-things obliged the map to be cleared away; and Phœbe, while measuring out the tea, said that she supposed Miss Charlecote would soon come down.

‘Then are not you a Charlecote?’ he asked, with a tone of disappointment.

‘Oh, no! I am Phœbe Fulmort. There is no Charlecote left but herself.’

‘It was my mother’s name; and mine, Humfrey

Charlecote Randolph. Sandbrook thought there was some connexion between the families.'

Phœbe absolutely started, hurt for a moment that a stranger should presume to claim a name of such associations; yet as she met the bright, honest eyes, feeling glad that it should still be a living name, worthily borne. 'It is an old family name at Hiltonbury, and one very much honoured,' she said.

'That is well,' he said. 'It is good to have a name that calls one to live up to it! And what is more strange, I am sure Miss Charlecote once had my mother's hair.'

'Beautiful ruddy gold?'

'Yes, yes; like no one else. I was wanting to do like poor Sandbrook.' He looked up in her face, and stroked her hair as she was leaning over him, and said, 'I don't like to miss my own curls.'

'Ah!' said Phœbe, half indignantly, 'he should know when those curls were hidden away and grew silvery.'

'He told me those things in part,' said the young man. 'He has felt the return very deeply, and I think it accounts for his being so much worse to-night—worse than I have seen him since we were at Montreal?'

'Is he quite sensible?'

'Perfectly. I see the ladies do not think him so to-night; but he has been himself from the first, except that over-fatigue or extra weakness affects his memory for the time; and he cannot read or exert his mind—scarcely be read to. And he is sadly depressed in spirits.'

'And no wonder, poor man,' said Phœbe.

'But I cannot think it is as they told us at Montreal?'

'What?'

'That the brain would go on weakening, and he become more childish. Now I am sure, as he has

grown stronger, he has recovered intellect and intelligence. No one could doubt it who heard him three days ago advising me what branch of mathematics to work up !'

'We shall hear to-morrow what Dr. F—— says. Miss Charlecote wrote to him as soon as we had my brother's telegram. I hope you are right !'

'For you see,' continued the Canadian, eagerly, 'injury from an external cause cannot be like original organic disease. I hope and trust he may recover. He is the best friend I ever had, except Mr. Henley, our clergyman at Lakeville. You know how he saved all our lives ; and he persuaded Mr. Currie to try me, and give me a chance of providing for my little brothers and their mother better than by our poor old farm.'

'Where are they ?' asked Phœbe.

'She is gone to her sister at Buffalo. The price of the land will help them on for a little while there, and if I can get on in engineering, I shall be able to keep them in some comfort. I began to think the poor boys were doomed to have no education at all.'

'Did you always live at Lakeville ?'

'No ; I grew up in a much more civilized part of the world. We had a beautiful farm upon Lake Ontario, and raised the best crops in the neighbourhood. It was not till we got entangled in the Land Company, five years ago, that we were sold up ; and we have been sinking deeper ever since—till the old cow and I had the farm all to ourselves.'

'How could you bear it ?' asked Phœbe.

'Well ! it was rather dreary to see one thing going after another. But somehow, after I lost my own black mare, poor Minnehaha, I never cared so much for any of the other things. Once for all, I got ashamed of my own childish selfishness. And then, you see, the worse things were, the stronger the call for exertion. That was the great help.'

'Oh, yes, I can quite imagine that—I know it,' said

Phœbe, thinking how exertion had helped her through her winter of trial. 'You never were without some one to work for.'

'No ; even when my father was gone'—and his voice was less clear—'there was the less time to feel the change, when the boys and their mother had nothing but me between them and want.'

'And you worked for them.'

'After a fashion,' he said, smiling. 'Spade-husbandry alone is very poor earth-scratching ; and I don't really know whether, between that and my gun, we could have got through this winter.'

'What a life !' exclaimed Phœbe. 'Realities, indeed !'

'It is only what many colonists undergo,' he answered ; 'if they do not prosper, it is a very hard life, and the shifting hopes render it the more trying to those who are not bred to it.'

'And to those that are ?' she asked.

'To those that are there are many compensations. It is a free out-of-doors life, and the glorious sense of extent and magnificence in our woods, the sport one has there, the beauty of our autumns, and our white, grand, silent winters, make it a life *well* worth living.'

'And would these have made you content to be a backwoodsman all your life ?'

'I cannot tell,' he said. 'They—and the boys—were my delight when I was one. And, after all, I used to recollect it was a place where there was a clear duty to do, and so, perhaps, safer than what fancy or choice would point at.'

'But you are very glad not to be still condemned to it.'

'Heartily glad not to be left to try to prop up a tumble-down log-hut with my own shoulder ;' he laughed. 'This journey to England has been the great desire of my life, and I am very thankful to have had it brought about.'

The conversation was broken off by Robert's entrance.

Finding that it was nearly nine o'clock, he went upstairs to remind Miss Charlecote that tea had long been awaiting her, and presently brought her back from the silent watch by Owen's side that had hitherto seemed to be rest and comfort to all the three.

Owen had begged that his cup might be sent up by his friend, on whom he was very dependent, and it was agreed that Mr. Randolph should sleep in his room, and remain as a guest at Woolstone Lane until Mr. Currie should come to town. Indeed, Miss Charlecote relied on him for giving the physician an account of the illness which Owen, at his best, could not himself describe; and she cordially thanked him for his evidently devoted attendance, going over every particular with him, but still so completely absorbed in her patient as to regard him in no light but as an appendage necessary to her boy.

'How did you get on with the backwoodsman, Phoebe?' asked Lucilla, when she came down to tea.

'I think he is a sterling character,' said Phoebe, in a tone of grave, deep thought, not quite as if answering the question, and with an observable deepening of the red of her cheek.

'You quaint goose!' said Lucy, with a laugh that jarred upon Honor, who turned round at her with a look of reproachful surprise.

'Indeed, Honor dear,' she said, in self-vindication I am not hard-hearted! I am only very much relieved! I don't think half so badly of poor Owen as I expected to do; and if we can keep Mrs. Murrell from driving him distracted, I expect to see him mend fast.'

Robert confirmed her cheerful opinion, but their younger and better prognostications fell sadly upon Honora's ear. She had been too much grieved and shocked to look for recovery, and all that she dared to expect was to tend her darling's feebleness, her best desire was that his mind might yet have power to embrace

the hope of everlasting Life, ere he should pass away from her. Let this be granted, and she was prepared to be thankful, be his decay never so painful to witness and attend.

She could not let Robert leave her that night without a trembling question whether he had learnt how it was with Owen on this point. He had not failed to inquire of the engineer, but he could tell her very little. Owen's conduct had been unexceptionable, but he had made scarcely any demonstration or profession, and on the few occasions when opinions were discussed, spoke not irreverently, but in the tone of one who regretted and respected the tenets that he no longer held. Since his accident, he had been too weak and confused to dwell on any subjects but those of the moment; but he had appeared to take pleasure in the unobtrusive, though decided religious habits of young Randolph.

There she must rest for the present, and trust to the influence of home, perhaps to that of the shadow of death. At least he was the child of many prayers, and had not Lucilla returned to her changed beyond her hopes? Let it be as it would, she could not but sleep in gratitude that both her children were again beneath her roof.

She was early dressed, and wishing the backwoodsman were anywhere but in Owen's room. However, to her joy, the door was open, and Owen called her in, looking so handsome as he lay partly raised by pillows, that she could hardly believe in his condition, except for his weak, subdued voice.

'Yes, I am much better this morning. I have slept off the headache, and have been enjoying the old sounds!'

'Where is your friend?'

'Rushed off to look at St. Paul's through the shaking of door-mats, and pay his respects to the Thames. He has none of the colonial *nil admirari* spirit, but looks at England as a Greek colonist would

have looked at Athens. I only regret that the reality must tame his raptures. I told him to come back by breakfast time.'

'He will lose his way.'

'Not he! You little know the backwood's power of topography! Even I could nearly rival some of the Arab stories, and he could guide you anywhere—or after any given beast in the Newcastle district. Honor, you must know and like him. He really is the New World Charlecote whom you always held over our heads.'

'I thought you called him Randolph?'

'That is his surname, but his Christian name is Humfrey Charlecote, from his grandfather. His mother was the lady my father told you of. He saved an old Bible out of the fire, with it all in the fly-leaf. He shall show it to you, and it can be easily confirmed by writing to the places. I would have gone myself, if I had not been the poor creature I am.'

'Yes, my dear,' said Honora, 'I dare say it is so. I am very glad you found so attentive a friend. I am most thankful to him for his care of you.'

'And you accept him as a relation,' said Owen, anxiously.

'Yes, oh, yes,' said Honor. 'Would you like anything before breakfast?'

Owen answered with a little plaintiveness. Perhaps he was disappointed at this cold acquiescence; but it was not a moment at which Honor could face the thought of a colonial claimant of the Holt. With Owen helpless upon her hands, she needed both a home and ample means to provide for him and his sister and child; and the American heir, an unwelcome idea twenty years previously, when only a vague possibility, was doubly undesirable when long possession had endeared her inheritance to her, when he proved not even to be a true Charlecote, and when her own adopted children were in sore want of all that she could do for them. The evident relinquishment of poor

Owen's own selfish views on the Holt made her the less willing to admit a rival, and she was sufficiently on the borders of age to be pained by having the question of heirship brought forward. And she knew, what Owen did not, that, if this youth's descent were indeed what it was said to be, he represented the elder line, and that even Humfrey had wondered what would be his duty in the present contingency.

'Nonsense!' said she to herself. 'There is no need as yet to think of it! The place is my own by every right! Humfrey told me so! I will take time to see what this youth may be, and make sure of his relationship. Then, if it be right and just, he shall come after me. But I *will* not raise expectations, nor notice him more than as Owen's friend and a distant kinsman. It would be fatally unsettling to do more.'

Owen urged her no farther. Either he had not energy to enforce any point for long together, or he felt that the succession might be a delicate subject, for he let her lead to his personal affairs, and he was invalid enough to find them fully engrossing.

The Canadian came in punctually, full of animation and excitement, of which Phœbe had the full benefit, till he was called to help Owen to dress. While this was going on, Robert came into the drawing-room to breathe, after the hard task of pacifying Mrs. Murrell.

'What are you going to do to-day, Phœbe?' he asked. 'Have you got through your shopping?'

'Some of it. Do you mean that you could come out with me?'

'Yes; you will never get through business otherwise.'

'Then if you have an afternoon to spare, could not we take Mr. Randolph to the Tower?'

'Why Phœbe!'

'He has only to-day at liberty, and is so full of eagerness about all the grand old historical places, that it seems hard that he should have to find his way

about alone, with no one to sympathize with him—half the day cut up, too, with nursing Owen.'

'He seems to have no difficulty in finding his way.'

'No; but I really should enjoy showing him the old armour. He was asking me about it this morning. I think he knows nearly as much of it as we do.'

'Very well. I say, Phœbe, would you object to my taking Brown and Clay—my two head boys? I owe them a treat, and they would just enter into this.'

Phœbe was perfectly willing to accept the two head boys, and the appointment had just been made when the doctor arrived. Again he brought good hope. From his own examination of Owen, and from Mr. Randolph's report, he was convinced that a considerable amelioration had taken place, and saw every reason to hope that in so young and vigorous a nature the injury to the brain might be completely repaired, and the use of the limbs might in part, at least, return, though full recovery could not be expected. He wished to observe his patient for a month or six weeks in town, that the course of treatment might be decided, after which he had better be taken to the Holt, to enjoy the pure air, and be out of doors as much as the season would permit.

To Honor this opinion was the cause of the deepest, most thankful gladness; but on coming back to Owen she found him sitting in his easy-chair, with his hand over his eyes, and his look full of inexpressible dejection and despondency. He did not, however, advert to the subject, only saying, 'Now then! let us have in the young pauper to see the old one.'

'My dear Owen, you had better rest.'

'No, no; let us do the thing. The grandmother, too!' he said impatiently.

'I will fetch little Owen; but you really are not fit for Mrs. Murrell.'

'Yes, I am; what am I good for but such things? It will make no difference, and it must be done.'

‘My boy, you do not know to what you expose yourself.’

‘Don’t I,’ said Owen, sadly.

Lucilla, even though Mr. Prendergast had just come to share her anxieties, caught her nephew on his way, and popped her last newly completed pinafore over his harlequinism, persuading him that it was most beautiful and new.

The interview passed off better than could have been hoped. The full-grown, grave-looking man was so different from the mere youth whom Mrs. Murrell had been used to scold and preach at, that her own awe seconded the lectures upon quietness that had been strenuously impressed on her; and she could not complain of his reception of his ‘oeful son,’ in form at least. Owen held out his hand to her, and bent to kiss his boy, signed to her to sit down, and patiently answered her inquiries and regrets, asking a few civil questions in his turn.

Then he exerted himself to say, ‘I hope to do my best for him and for you, Mrs. Murrell, but I can make no promises; I am entirely dependent at present, and I do not know whether I may not be so for life.’

Whereat, and at the settled mournful look with which it was spoken, Mrs. Murrell burst out crying, and little Owen hung on her, almost crying too. Honor, who had been lying in wait for Owen’s protection, came hastily in and made a clearance, Owen again reaching out his hand, which he laid on the child’s head, so as to turn up the face towards him for a moment. Then releasing it almost immediately, he rested his chin on his hand, and Honor heard him mutter under his moustache, ‘Flibbertigibbet!’

‘When we go home, we will take little Owen with us,’ said Honor, kindly. ‘It is high time he was taken from Little Whittington-street. Country air will soon make a different looking child of him.’

‘Thank you,’ he answered, despondingly. ‘It is

very good in you ; but have you not troubles enough already ?'

'He shall not be a trouble, but a pleasure.'

'Poor little wretch ! He must grow up to work, and to know that he must work while he can ;' and Owen passed his hand over those useless fingers of his as though the longing to be able to work were strong on him.

Honor had agreed with Lucilla that father and son ought to be together, and that little 'Hoeing's' education ought to commence. Cilla insisted that all care of him should fall to her. She was in a vehement, passionate mood of self-devotion, more overset by hearing that her brother would be a cripple for life than by what appeared to her the less melancholy doom of an early death. She had allowed herself to hope so much from his improvement on the voyage, that what to Honor was unexpected gladness was to her grievous disappointment. Mr. Prendergast arrived to find her half captious, half desperate.

See Owen ! Oh, no ! he must not think of it. Owen had seen quite people enough to-day ; besides, he would be letting all out to him as he had done the other day.

Poor Mr. Prendergast humbly apologized for his betrayal ; but had not Owen been told of the engagement ?

Oh, dear, no ! He was in no state for fresh agitations. Indeed, with him, a miserable, helpless cripple, Lucy did not see how she could go on as before. She could not desert him—oh, no !—she must work for him and his child.

'Work ! Why, Cilla, you have not strength for it.'

'I am quite well. I have strength for anything now I have some one to work for. Nothing hurt me but loneliness.'

'Folly, child ! The same home that receives you will receive them.'

‘Nonsense ! As if I could throw such a dead weight on any one’s hands !’

‘Not on *any one’s*,’ said Mr. Prendergast. ‘But I see how it is, Cilla ; you have changed your mind.’

‘No,’ said Lucilla, with an outbreak of her old impatience ; ‘but you men are so selfish ! Bothering me about proclaiming all this nonsense, just when my brother is come home in this wretched state ! After all, he was my brother before anything else, and I have a right to consider him first !’

‘Then, Cilla, you shall be bothered no more,’ said Mr. Prendergast, rising. ‘If you want me, well and good—you know where to find your old friend ; if not, and you can’t make up your mind to it, why, then we are as we were in old times. Good bye, my dear ; I won’t fret you any more.’

‘No,’ said he to himself, as he paused in the Court, and was busy wiping from the sleeve of his coat two broad dashes of wet that had certainly not proceeded from the clouds, ‘the dear child’s whole heart is with her brother now she has got him back again. I’ll not torment her any more. What a fool I was to think that anything but loneliness could have made her accept me—poor darling ! I think I’ll go out to the Bishop of Sierra Leone !’

‘What can have happened to him ?’ thought Phœbe, as he strode past the little party on their walk to the Tower. ‘Can that wretched little Cilly have been teasing him ? I am glad Robert has escaped from her clutches !’

However, Phœbe had little leisure for such speculations in the entertainment of witnessing her companion’s intelligent interest in all that he saw. The walk itself—for which she had begged—was full of wonder ; and the Tower, which Robert’s slight knowledge of one of the officials enabled them to see in perfection, received the fullest justice, both historically and loyally. The incumbent of St. Matthew’s was so

much occupied with explanations to his boys, that Phœbe had the stranger all to herself, and thus entered to the full into that unfashionable but most heart-stirring of London sights, 'the Towers of Julius,' from the Traitors' Gate, where Elizabeth sat in her lion-like desolation, to her effigy in her glory upon Tilbury Heath—the axe that severed her mother's 'slender neck'—the pistol-crowned stick of her father—the dark cage where her favourite Raleigh was mewed—and the whole series of the relics of the disgraces and the glories of England's royal line—well fitted, indeed, to strike the imagination of one who had grown up in the New World without antiquity.

If it were a satisfaction to be praised and thanked for this expedition, Phœbe had it; for on her return she was called into Owen's room, where his first words to her were of thanks for her good-nature to his friend.

'I am sure it was nothing but a pleasure,' she said. 'It happened that Robert had some boys whom he wanted to take.' Somehow she did not wish Owen to think she had done it on his own account.

'And you liked him?' asked Owen.

'Yes, very much indeed,' she heartily said.

'Ah! I knew you would;' and he lay back as if fatigued. Then, as Phœbe was about to leave him, he added—'I can't get my ladies to heed anything but me. You and Robert must take pity on him, if you please. Get him to Westminster Abbey, or the Temple Church, or somewhere worth seeing to-morrow. Don't let them be extortionate of his waiting on me. I must learn to do without him.'

Phœbe promised, and went.

'Phœbe is grown what one calls a fine young woman instead of a sweet girl,' said Owen to his sister, when she next came into the room; 'but she has managed to keep her innocent, half-wondering look, just as she has the freshness of her colour.'

'Well, why not, when she has not had one *real* experience?' said Lucilla, a little bitterly.

‘None?’ he asked, with a marked tone.

‘None,’ she answered, and he let his hand drop with a sigh; but as if repenting of any half betrayal of feeling, added, ‘she has had all her brothers and sisters at sixes and sevens, has not she?’

‘Do you call that a real experience?’ said Lucilla, almost with disdain, and the conversation dropped.

Owen’s designs for his friend’s Sunday fell to the ground. The backwoodsman fenced off the proposals for his pleasure, by his wish to be useful in the sick room; and when told of Owen’s desire, was driven to confess that he did not wish for fancy church-going on his first English Sunday. There was enough novelty without that; the cathedral service was too new for him to wish to hear it for the first time when there was so much that was unsettling.

Honor, and even Robert, were a little disappointed. They thought eagerness for musical service almost necessarily went with church feeling; and Phœbe was the least in the world out of favour for the confession that though it was well that choirs should offer the most exquisite and ornate praise, yet that her own country-bred associations with the plain, unadorned service at Hiltonbury rendered her more at home where the prayers were read, and the responses congregational, not choral. To her it was more devotional, though she fully believed that the other way was the best for those who had begun with it.

So they went as usual to the full service of the parish church, where the customs were scrupulously rubrical without being ornate. The rest and calm of that Sunday were a boon, coming as they did after a bustling week.

All the ensuing days Phœbe was going about choosing curtains and carpets, or hiring servants for herself or Mervyn. She was obliged to act alone, for Miss Charlecote, on whom she had relied for aid, was engrossed in attending on Owen, and endeavouring to wile away the hours that hung heavily on one in-

capable of employment or even attention for more than a few minutes together. So constantly were Honor and Lucy engaged with him, that Phœbe hardly saw them morning, noon, or night ; and after being out for many hours, it generally fell to her lot to entertain the young Canadian for the chief part of the evening. Mr. Currie had arrived in town on the Monday, and came at once to see Owen. His lodgings were in the City, where he would be occupied for some time in more formally mapping out and reporting on the various lines proposed for the G. O. and S. line ; and finding how necessary young Randolph still was to the invalid, he willingly agreed to the proposal that while Miss Charlecote continued in London, the young man should continue to sleep and spend his evenings in Woolstone Lane.



CHAPTER XVII.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall of the snow,
Before the soil hath smutched it?

BEN JONSON.

AT the end of a week Mervyn made his appearance in a vehement hurry. Cecily's next sister, an officer's wife, was coming home with two little children, for a farewell visit before going to the Cape, and Maria and Bertha must make way for her. So he wanted to take Phœbe home that afternoon to get the Underwood ready for them.

'Mervyn, how can I go? I am not nearly ready.'

'What can you have been doing then?' he exclaimed, with something of his old temper.

'This house has been in such a state.'

'Well, you were not wanted to nurse the sick man, were you? I thought you were one that *was* to be trusted. What more is there to do?'

Phœbe looked at her list of commissions, and found herself convicted. Those patterns ought to have been sent back two days since. What had she been about? Listening to Mr. Randolph's explanations of the *Hiawatha* scenery! Why had she not written a note about that hideous hearth-rug? Because Mr. Randolph was looking over Stowe's *Survey of London*. Methodical

Phœbe felt herself in disgrace, and yet, somehow, she could not be sorry enough ; she wanted a reprieve from exile at Hiltonbury, alone and away from all that was going on. At least she should hear whether *Macbeth*, at the Princess's Theatre, fulfilled Mr. Randolph's conceptions of it ; and if Mr. Currie approved his grand map of the Newcastle district, with the little trees that she had taught him to draw.

Perhaps it was the first time that Mervyn had ever been justly angry with her ; but he was so much less savage than in his injustice that she was very much ashamed and touched ; and finally, deeply grateful for the grace of this one day in which to repair her negligence, provided she would be ready to start by seven o'clock next morning. Hard and diligently she worked, and very late she came home. As she was on her way upstairs she met Robert coming out of Owen's room.

'Phœbe,' he said, turning with her into her room, 'what is the matter with Lucy ?'

'The matter ?'

'Do you mean that you have not observed how ill she is looking ?'

'No ; nothing particular.'

'Really, Phœbe, I cannot imagine what you have been thinking about. I thought you would have saved her, and helped Miss Charlecote, and you absolutely never noticed her looks !'

'I am very sorry. I have been so much engaged.'

'Absorbed, you should call it ! Who would have thought *you* would be so heedless of her ?'

He was gone. 'Still crazy about Lucy,' was Phœbe's first thought ; her second, 'Another brother finding me heedless and selfish ! What can be the matter with me ?' And when she looked at Lucilla with observant eyes, she did indeed recognise the justice of Robert's anxiety and amazement. The brilliant prettiness had faded away as if under a blight, the eyes were sinking into purple hollows, the attitude was

listless, the whole air full of suffering. Phoebe was dismayed and conscience-stricken, and would fain have offered inquiries and sympathy, but no one had more thoroughly than Lucy the power of repulsion. 'No, nothing was amiss—of course she felt the frost. She would not speak to Honor—there was nothing to speak about ;' and she went up to her brother's room.

Mr. Randolph was out with Mr. Currie; and Phoebe, still exceedingly busy writing notes and orders, and packing for her journey, did not know that there was an unconscious resolution in her own mind that her business *should* not be done till he came home, were it at one o'clock at night! He did come at no unreasonable hour, and found her fastening directions upon the pile of boxes in the hall.

'What are you doing? Miss Charlecote is not going away?'

'No; but I am going to-morrow.'

'You!'

'Yes; I must get into our new house, and receive my sisters there the day after to-morrow.'

'I thought you lived with Miss Charlecote.'

'Is it possible that you did not know what I have been doing all this week?'

'Were you not preparing a house for your brother?'

'Yes, and another for myself. Did you not understand that we set up housekeeping separately upon his marriage?'

'I did not understand,' said Humfrey Randolph, disconsolately. 'You told me you owed everything to Miss Charlecote.'

'I am afraid your colonial education translated that into £ s. d.'

'Then you are not poor?'

'No, not exactly,' said Phoebe, rather puzzled and amused by his downcast air.

'But,' he exclaimed, 'your brother is in business; and Mr. Fulmort of St. Matthew's——'

'Mr. Fulmort of St. Matthew's is poor because he

gave all to St. Matthew's,' said Phœbe ; 'but our business is not a small one, and the property in the country is large.'

He pasted on her last direction in disconsolate silence, then reading, 'Miss Fulmort, The Underwood, Hiltonbury, Elverslope Station,' resumed with fresh animation, 'At least you live near Miss Charlecote?'

'Yes, we are wedged in between her park and our own—my brother's, I mean.'

'That is all right then! She has asked me for Christmas.'

'I am very glad of it,' said Phœbe. 'There, thank you ; good night.'

'Is there nothing more that I can do for you?'

'Nothing—no, no, don't hammer that down, you will wake Owen. Good night, good-bye ; I shall be gone by half-past six.'

Though Phœbe said good-bye, she knew perfectly well that the hours of the morning were as nothing to the backwoodsman, and with spirits greatly exhilarated by the Christmas invitation, she went to bed, much too sleepy to make out why her wealth seemed so severe a shock to Humfrey Randolph.

The six o'clock breakfast was well attended, for Miss Charlecote was there herself, as well as the Canadian, Phœbe, and Mervyn, who was wonderfully amiable considering the hour in the morning. Phœbe felt in some slight degree less unfeeling when she found that Lucilla's fading looks had been no more noticed by Miss Charlecote than by herself ; but Honor thought Owen's illness accounted for all, and only promised that the doctor should inspect her.

A day of exceeding occupation ensued. Mervyn talked the whole way of Cecily, his plans and his prospects ; and Phœbe had to draw her mind out of one world and immerse it into another, straining ears and voice all the time to hear and be heard through the roar of the train. He left her at the cottage ; and

then began the work of the day, presiding over upholsterers, hanging pictures, arranging books, settling cabinets of collections, disposing of ornaments, snatching meals at odd times, in odder places, and never daring to rest till long after dark, when, with fingers freshly purified from dust, limbs stiff with running up and down stairs, and arms tired with heavy weights, she sat finally down before the drawing-room fire with her solitary cup of coffee, and a book that she was far too weary to open.

Had she never been tired before, that her heart should sink in this unaccountable way? Why could she not be more glad that her sisters were coming home, and dear Miss Fennimore? What made every one seem so dull and stupid, and the comings and goings so oppressive, as if everything would be hateful till Christmas? Why had she belied all her previous good character for method and punctuality of late, and felt as if existence only began when—one person was in the room?

Oh! can this be falling in love?

There was a chiffonier with a looking-glass back just opposite to her, and, raising her eyes, poor Phoebe beheld a young lady with brow, cheeks, and neck perfectly glowing with crimson!

‘You shan’t stand there long, at any rate,’ said she, almost vindictively, getting up and pushing the table with its deep cover between her and the answering witness.

‘Love! Nonsense! Yet I don’t see why I should be ashamed! Yes! He is my wise man, he is the real Humfrey Charlecote! His is the very nature I always thought some one must still have—the exact judgment I longed to meet with. Not stern like Robin’s, not sharp like Mervyn’s, nor high-flying like dear Miss Charlecote’s, nor soft like Bevil’s, nor light like Lucy’s, nor clear and clever like Miss Fennimore’s—no, but considerate and solid, tender and true—such as one can lean upon! I know why he has

the steadfast eyes that I liked so much the first evening. And there is so much more in him than I can measure or understand. Yes, though I have known him but ten days, I have seen much more of him than of most men in a year. And he has been so much tried, and has had such a life, that he may well be called a real hero in a quiet way. Yes, I well may like him! And I am sure he likes me!’ said another whisper of the heart, which, veiled as was the lady in the mirror, made Phoebe put both hands over her face, in a shamefaced ecstatic consciousness. ‘Nay—I was the first lady he had seen, the only person to speak to. No, no; I know it was not that!—I feel it was not! Why, otherwise, did he seem so sorry I was not poor? Oh! how nice it would be if I were! We could work for each other in his glorious new land of hope! I, who love work, was made for work! I don’t care for this mere young lady life! And must my trumpery thousand a year stand in the way? As to birth, I suppose he is as well or better born than I—and, oh! so far superior in tone and breeding to what ours used to be! He ought to know better than to think me a fine young lady, and himself only an engineer’s assistant! But he wont! Of course he will be honourable about it—and—and perhaps never dare to say another word till he has made his fortune—and when will that ever be? It will be right——’ ‘But,’ (and a very different but it was this time) ‘what am I thinking about? How can I be wishing such things when I have promised to devote myself to Maria? If I could rough it gladly, she could not; and what a shameful thing it is of me to have run into all this long day dream and leave her out. No, I know my lot! I am to live on here, and take care of Maria, and grow to be an old maid! I shall hear about him, when he comes to be a great man, and know that the Humfrey Charlecote I dreamt about is still alive! There, I wont have any more nonsense!’

And she opened her book ; but finding that Humfrey Randolph's remarks would come between her and the sense, she decided that she was too tired to read, and put herself to bed. But there the sense of wrong towards Maria filled her with remorse that she had accepted her rights of seniority, and let the maids place her in the prettiest room, with the best bay window, and most snug fireplace ; nor could she rest till she had pacified her self-reproach, by deciding that all her own goods should move next day into the chamber that did not look at the Holt firs, but only at the wall of the back yard.

‘Yes,’ said Phœbe, stoutly, in her honest dealing with herself in her fresh, untried morning senses. ‘I do love Humfrey Charlecote Randolph, and I think he loves me ! Whether anything more may come of it, will be ordered for me ; but whether it do so or not, it is a blessing to have known one like him, and now that I am warned, and can try to get back self-control, I will begin to be the better for it. Even if I am not quite so happy, this is something more beautiful than I ever knew before. I will be content !’

And when Bertha and Maria arrived, brimful of importance at having come home with no escort but a man and maid, and voluble with histories of Sutton, and wedding schemes, they did not find an absent nor inattentive listener. Yet the keen Bertha made the remark, ‘Something has come over you, Phœbe. You have more countenance than ever you had before.’

Whereat Phœbe's colour rushed into her cheeks, but she demanded the meaning of countenance, and embarked Bertha in a dissertation.

When Phœbe was gone, Robert found it less difficult to force Lucilla to the extremity of a *tête-à-tête*. Young Randolph was less in the house, and, when there, more with Owen than before, and Lucilla was necessarily sometimes to be caught alone in the drawing-room.

‘Lucy,’ said Robert, the first time this occurred, ‘I have a question to ask you.’

‘Well!’—she turned round half defiant.

‘A correspondent of Mervyn, on the Spanish coast, has written to ask him to find a chaplain for the place, guaranteeing a handsome stipend.’

‘Well,’ said Lucilla, in a cold voice this time.

‘I wished to ask whether you thought it would be acceptable to Mr. Prendergast.’

‘I neither know nor care.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Robert, after a pause; ‘but though I believe I learnt it sooner than I ought, I was sincerely glad to hear——’

‘Then unhear!’ said Lucilla, pettishly. ‘You, at least, ought to be glad of that.’

‘By no means,’ returned Robert, gravely. ‘I have far too great a regard for you not to be most deeply concerned at what I see is making you unhappy.’

‘May not I be unhappy if I like, with my brother in this state?’

‘That is not all, Lucilla.’

‘Then never mind! You are the only one who never pitied me, and so I like you. Don’t spoil it now!’

‘You need not be afraid of my pitying you if you have brought on this misunderstanding by your old spirit!’

‘Not a bit of it! I tell you he pitied me. I found it out in time, so I set him free. That’s all.’

‘And that was the offence?’

‘Offence! What are you talking of? He didn’t offend—No, but when I said I could not bring so many upon him, and could not have Owen teased about the thing, he said he would bother me no more, that I had Owen, and did not want him. And then he walked off.’

‘Taking you at your word?’

‘Just as if one might not say what one does not mean when one wants a little comforting,’ said Lucy, pouting; ‘but, after all, it is a very good thing—he is

saved a great plague for a very little time, and if it were all pity, so much the better. I say, Robin, shall you be man enough to read the service over me, just where we stood at poor Edna's funeral ?

'I don't think that concerns you much,' said Robert.

'Well, the lady in Madge Wildfire's song was gratified at the "six braw gentlemen" who "kirkward should carry her." Why should you deprive me of that satisfaction. Really, Robin, it is quite true. A little happiness might have patched me up, but——'

'The symptoms are recurring? Have you seen F——?'

'Yes. Let me alone, Robin. It is the truest mercy to let me wither up with as little trouble as possible to those who don't want me. Now that you know it, I am glad I can talk to you, and you will help me to think of what has never been enough before my eyes.'

Robert made no answer but a hasty good-bye, and was gone.

Lucilla gave a heavy sigh, and then exclaimed, half-aloud—

'Oh, the horrid little monster that I am. Why can't I help it? I verily believe I shall flirt in my shroud, and if I were canonized my first miracle would be like St. Philomena's, to make my own relics presentable !'

Wherewith she fell a laughing, with a laughter that soon turned to tears, and the exclamation, 'Why can I make nobody care for me but those I can't care for? I can't help disgusting all that is good, and it will be well when I am dead and gone. There's only one that will shed tears good for anything, and he is well quit of me !'

The poor little lonely thing wept again, and after her many sleepless nights, she fairly cried herself to sleep. She awoke with a start, at some one being admitted into the room.

‘My dear, am I disturbing you?’

It was the well-known voice, and she sprang up.

‘Mr. Pendy, Mr. Pendy, I was very naughty! I didn’t mean it. Oh, will you bear with me again, though I don’t deserve it.’

She clung to him like a child weary with its own naughtiness.

‘I was too hasty,’ he said; ‘I forgot how wrapped up you were in your brother, and how little attention you could spare, and then I thought that in him you had found all you wanted, and that I was only in your way.’

‘How could you? Didn’t you know better than to think that people put their brothers before their—Mr. Pendys?’

‘You seemed to wish to do so.’

‘Ah! but you should have known it was only for the sake of being coaxed!’ said Lucilla, hanging her head on one side.

‘You should have told me so.’

‘But how was I to know it?’ And she broke out into a very different kind of laughter. ‘I’m sure I thought it was all magnanimity, but it is of no use to die of one’s own magnanimity, you see.’

‘You are not going to die; you are coming to this Spanish place, which will give you lungs of brass.’

‘Spanish place? How do you know? I have not slept into to-morrow, have I? That Robin has not flown to Wrapworth and back since three o’clock?’

‘No, I was only inquiring at Mrs. Murrell’s.’

‘Oh, you silly, silly person, why couldn’t you come here?’

‘I did not want to bother you.’

‘For shame, for shame; if you say that again I shall know you have not forgiven me. It is a moral against using words too strong for the occasion! So Robert carried you the offer of the chaplaincy, and you mean to have it!’

‘I could not help coming, as he desired, to see what you thought of it.’

‘I only know,’ she said, half crying, yet laughing, ‘that you had better marry me out of hand before I get into any more mischief.’

The chaplaincy was promising. The place was on the lovely coast of Andalusia. There was a small colony of English engaged in trade, and the place was getting into favour with invalids. Mervyn’s correspondent was anxious to secure the services of a good man, and the society of a lady-like wife, and offered to guarantee a handsome salary, such as justified the curate in giving up his chance of a college living; and though it was improbable that he would ever learn a word of Spanish, or even get so far as the pronunciation of the name of the place, the advantages that the appointment offered were too great to be rejected, when Lucilla’s health needed a southern climate.

‘Oh! yes, yes, let us go,’ she cried. ‘It will be a great deal better than anything at home can be.’

‘Then you venture on telling Owen, now!’

‘Oh, yes! It was a mere delusion of mine that it would cost him anything. Honor is all that he wants, I am rather in their way than otherwise. He rests on her down-pillow-ship, and she sees, hears, knows nothing but him!’

‘Is Miss Charlecote aware of—what has been going wrong?’

‘Not she! I told her before that I should take my own time for the communication, and I verily believe she has forgotten all about it! Then little demure Phœbe fell over head and ears in love with the backwoodsman on the spot, and walked about in a dream such as ought to have been good fun to watch, if I had had the spirit for it; and if Robert had not been sufficiently disengaged to keep his eyes open, I don’t know whether anything would have roused them short of breaking a blood-vessel or two.’

‘I shall never rest till you are in my keeping! I will go to Fulmort at once, and tell him that I accept.’

‘And I will go to Owen, and break the news to him. When are you coming again?’

‘To-morrow, as soon as I have opened school.’

‘Ah! the sooner we are gone the better! Much good you can be to poor Wrapworth! Just tell me, please, that I may know how badly I served you, how often you have inquired at Mrs. Murrell’s.’

‘Why—I believe—each day except Saturday and Sunday; but I never met him there till just now.’

Lucilla’s eyes swam with tears; she laid her head on his shoulder, and, in a broken voice of deep emotion, she said, ‘Indeed, I did not deserve it! But I think I shall be good now, for I can’t tell why I should be so much loved!’

Mr. Prendergast was vainly endeavouring to tell her why, when Humfrey Randolph’s ring was heard, and she rushed out of the room.

Owen’s first hearty laugh since his return was at her tidings. That over, he spoke with brotherly kindness.

‘Yes, Lucy,’ he said, ‘I do think it is the best and happiest thing for you. He is the only man whom you could not torment to death, or who would have any patience with your antics.’

‘I don’t think I shall try,’ said Lucy. ‘What are you shaking your head for, Owen? Have I not had enough to tame me?’

‘I beg your pardon, Cilly. I was only thinking of the natural companionship of bears and monkeys. Don’t beat me!’

‘Some day you shall come out and see us perform, that’s all,’ said Lucilla, merrily. ‘But indeed, Owen, if I know myself at all, unmerited affection and forbearance, with no nonsense about it, is the only way to keep me from flying out. At any rate, I can’t live without it!’

‘Ah!’ said Owen, gravely, ‘you have suffered too

much through me for me to talk to you in this fashion. Forgive me, Lucy ; I am not up to any other, just yet.'

Whatever Lucilla might have said in the first relief of recovering Mr. Prendergast, she could not easily have made up her mind to leave her brother in his present condition, and flattered herself that the '*at once*' could not possibly be speedy, since Mr. Prendergast must give notice of his intention of leaving Wrapworth.

But when he came the next morning, it proved that things were in a far greater state of forwardness than she had thought possible. So convinced were both the curate and Robert of the need of her avoiding the winter cold, that the latter had suggested that one of his own curates, who was in need of change and country air, should immediately offer himself as a substitute at Wrapworth, either for a time or permanently, and Lucy was positively required to name a day as early as possible for the marriage, and told, on the authority of the physician, that it might almost be called suicide to linger in the English frosts.

The day which she chose was the 1st of December, the same on which Mervyn was to be married. There was a purpose in thus rendering it impracticable for any Fulmort to be present ; 'And,' said Owen, 'I am glad it should be before I am about. I could never keep my countenance if I had to give her away to brother Peter !'

'Keeping his countenance' might have two meanings, but he was too feeble for agitation, and seemed only able to go through the time of preparation and parting, by keeping himself as lethargic and indifferent as possible, or by turning matters into a jest when necessarily brought before him. Playing at solitaire, or trifling desultory chat, was all that he could endure as occupation, and the long hours were grievously heavy. His son, though nearly four years old, was no companion or pleasure to him. He was, in his helpless and morbid state, afraid of so young a child,

and little Owen was equally afraid of him ; each dreaded contact with the other, and more than all the being shut into a room together ; and the little boy, half shy, half assured, filled by the old woman with notions of his own grandeur, and yet constrained by the different atmosphere of Woolstone Lane, was never at ease or playful enough before him to be pleasant to watch. And, indeed, his Cockney pronunciation and ungainly vulgar tricks had been so summarily repressed by his aunt, that his fear of both of the ladies rendered him particularly unengaging and unchildlike. Nevertheless, Honora thought it her duty to take him home with her to the Holt, and gratified Robert by engaging a nice little girl of fourteen, whom Lucilla called the crack orphan, to be his attendant when they should leave town. This was to be about a fortnight after the wedding, since St. Wulstan's afforded greater opportunities for privacy and exemption from bustle than even Hiltonbury, and Dr. Prendergast and his daughter could attend without being in the house.

The Prendergasts of Southminster were very kind and friendly, sending Lucilla warm greetings, and not appearing at all disconcerted at welcoming their former governess into the family. The elders professed no surprise, but great gladness ; and Sarah, who *was* surprised, was trebly rejoiced. Owen accused his sister of selecting her solitary bridesmaid with a view to enhancing her own beauty by force of contrast ; but the choice was prompted by real security of the affectionate pleasure it would confer. Handsome presents were sent both by the Beaumonts and Bostocks, and Lucilla, even while half-fretted, half-touched by Mrs. Bostock's patronizing felicitations, could not but be pleased at these evidences that her governess-ship had not been an utter failure.

Her demeanour in the fortnight before her marriage was unlike what her friends had ever seen, and made them augur better for Mr. Prendergast's venture. She was happy, but subdued ; quiet and womanly, gentle

without being sad, grave but not drooping ; and though she was cheerful and playful, with an entire absence of those strange effervescences that had once betrayed acidity or fermentation. She had found the power of being affectionately grateful to Honor, and the sweetness of her tender ways towards her and Owen would have made the parting all the sadder to them if it had not been evident that, as she said, it was happiness that thus enabled her to be good. The satisfied look of rest that had settled on her fair face made it new. All her animation and archness had not rendered it half so pleasant to look upon.

The purchaser of Castle Blanch proved to be no other than Mr. Calthorp ! Lucilla at first was greatly discomfited, and begged that nothing might be said about the picture ; but the next time Mr. Prendergast arrived, it was with a request from Mr. Calthorp that Miss Sandbrook would accept the picture as a wedding gift ! There was no refusing it—indeed, the Curate had already accepted it ; and when Lucilla heard that ‘ the Calthorp ’ had been two years married to what Mr. Prendergast called ‘ a millionairess, exceedingly hideous,’ she still had vanity enough to reflect that the removal of her own resemblance might be an act of charity ! And the sum that Honor had set apart for the purchase was only too much wanted for the setting up housekeeping in Spain, whither the portrait was to accompany her, Mr. Prendergast, declared, like the Penates of the pious Æneas !

Robert brought in his gift on the last day of November, just before setting off for Sutton. It was an unornamented, but exquisitely-bound Bible and Prayer Book, dark brown, with red-edged leaves.

‘ Good-bye, Lucilla,’ he said ; ‘ you have been the brightest spot to me in this life. Thank you for all you have done for me.’

‘ And for all I never intended to do ?’ said Lucilla, smiling, as she returned his pressure of the hand.

He was gone, not trusting her to speak, nor himself to hear a word more.

‘Yes, Robin,’ proceeded Lucy, half-aloud, ‘you are the greater man, I know very well; but it is in human nature to prefer flesh and blood to mediæval saints in cast-iron, even if one knows there is a tender spot in them.’

There was a curious sense of humiliation in her full acquiescence in the fact that he was too high, too grand for her, and in her relief, that the affection, that would have lifted her beyond what she was prepared for, had died away, and left her to the more ordinary excellence and half-paternal fondness of the man of her real choice, with whom she could feel perfect ease and repose. Possibly the admixture of qualities that in her had been called *fast* is the most contrary to all real aspiration!

But there was no fault to be found with the heartfelt affection with which she loved and honoured her bridegroom, lavishing on him the more marks of deference and submission just because she knew that her will would be law, and that his love was strong enough to have borne with any amount of caprice or seeming neglect. The sacrifices she made, without his knowledge, for his convenience and comfort, while he imagined hers to be solely consulted, the concessions she made to his slightest wish, the entire absence of all teasing, would not have been granted to a younger man more prepossessing in the sight of others.

It was in this spirit that she rejected all advice to consult health rather than custom in her wedding dress. Exactly because Mr. Prendergast would have willingly received her in the plainest garb, she was bent on doing him honour by the most exquisite bridal array; and never had she been so lovely—her colour such exquisite carnation, her eyes so softened, and full of such repose and reliance, her grace so perfect in complete freedom from all endeavour at attracting admiration.

The married pair came back from Church to Owen’s

sitting-room—not bear and monkey, not genie and fairy, as he had expected to see; but as they stood together, looking so indescribably and happily one, that Owen smiled and said, ‘Ah! Honor, if you had only known twenty years ago that this was Mrs. Peter Prendergast, how much trouble it would have saved.’

‘She did not deserve to be Mrs. Peter Prendergast,’ said the bride.

‘See how you deserve it now.’

‘That I never shall!’

Brother and sister parted with light words but full hearts, each trying to believe, though neither crediting Mr. Prendergast’s assurance that the two Owens should come and be at home for ever if they liked in Santa Maria de X——. Neither could bear to face the truth that henceforth their courses lay apart, and that if the sister’s life were spared, it could only be at the sacrifice of expatriation for many years, in lands where, well or ill, the brother had no call. Nor would Lucilla break down. It was due to her husband not to let him think she suffered too much in resigning home for him; and true to her innate hatred of agitation, she guarded herself from realizing anything, and though perfectly kind and respectful to Honor, studiously averted all approaches to effusion of feeling.

Only at the last kiss in the hall, she hung round her friend with a vehement embrace, and whispered, ‘Forgive! You have forgiven!’

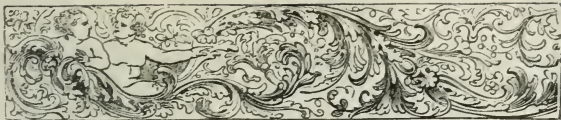
‘Forgive me, Lucilla!’

‘Nay, that I have forgiven you for all your pardon and patience is shown by my enduring to leave Owen to you now.’

Therewith surged up such a flood of passionate emotions that, fleeing from them as it were, the bride tore herself out of Honor’s arms, and sprang hastily into the carriage, nervously and hastily moving about its contents while Mr. Prendergast finished his farewells.

After all, there was a certain sense of rest, snugness, and freedom from turmoil, when Honor dried her eyes and went back to her convalescent. The house seemed peaceful, and they both felt themselves entering into the full enjoyment of being all in all to one another.

There was one guest at the Sutton wedding, whose spirit was at St. Wulstan's. In those set eyes, and tightly closed lips, might be traced abstraction in spite of himself. Were there not thoughts and prayers for another bride, elsewhere kneeling? Was not the solitary man struggling with the last remnants of fancies at war with his life of self-devotion, and crushing down the few final regrets, that would have looked back to the dreams of his youth. No marvel that his greatest effort was against being harsh and unsympathizing, even while his whole career was an endeavour to work through charities of deed and word into charities of thought and judgment.



CHAPTER XVIII.

Untouched by love, the maiden's breast
Is like the snow on Rona's crest
High seated in the middle sky,
In bright and barren purity ;
But by the sunbeam gently kissed,
Scarce by the gazing eye 'tis missed,
Ere down the lonely valley stealing,
Fresh grass and growth its course revealing ;
It cheers the flock, revives the flower,
And decks some happy shepherd's bower.

SCOTT.



LOW to choose, but decided in her choice, Phœbe had always been, and her love formed no exception to this rule. She was quite aware that her heart had been given away, and never concealed it from herself, though she made it a principle not to indulge in future castle buildings, and kept a resolute guard over her attention. It was impossible to obviate a perpetual feeling of restlessness and of tedium in whatever she was about ; but she conquered oftener than she gave way, and there was an indescribable sense of peace and sweetness in a new and precious possession, and an undefined hope through all.

Miss Fennimore, who came the day after the girls' return from Sutton, saw only the fuller development of her favourite pupil, and, in truth, Maria and Bertha had so ineffably much to narrate, that her attention would have been sufficiently engrossed to hinder her

observation of the symptoms, even had the good lady been as keen and experienced in love as in science.

Poor little Phœbe ! equable as she was, she was in a great perturbation when, four days before Christmas, she knew that Miss Charlecote, with Owen Sandbrook and Humfrey Randolph, had arrived at the Holt. What was so natural as for her to go at once to talk over the two weddings with her dear old friend ? Yes, but did her dear old friend want her, when these two young men had put an end to her solitude ? Was she only making Miss Charlecote an excuse ? She would wait in hopes that one of the others would ask if she were going to the Holt ! If so, it could not but be natural and proper—if not— This provoking throbbing of her heart showed that it was not only for Honor Charlecote that she wished to go.

That ring at the bell ! What an abominable goose she was to find a flush of expectation in her cheek ! And after all it was only Sir John. He had found that his son had heard nothing from the Holt that morning, and had come in to ask if she thought a call would be acceptable. ‘I knew they were come home,’ he said, ‘for I saw them at the station yesterday. I did not show myself, for I did not know how poor young Sandbrook might like it. But who have they
(t with them ?’

‘Mr. Randolph, Owen Sandbrook’s Canadian friend.’

‘Did I not hear he was some sort of relation ?’

‘Yes ; his mother was a Charlecote.’

‘Ha ! that accounts for it, Seeing him with her, I could almost have thought it was thirty years ago, and that it was my dear old friend.’

Phœbe could have embraced Sir John. She could not conceal her glow of delight so completely that Bertha did not laugh and say, ‘Mr. Charlecote is what the Germans would call Phœbe’s *Bild*. She always blushes and looks conscious if he is mentioned.’

Sir John laughed, but with some emotion, and Phœbe hastily turned her still more blushing face away. Cer-

tainly, if Phœbe had had any prevision of her present state of mind, she never would have bought that chifoniere.

When Sir John had sufficiently admired the details of the choice little drawing-room, and had been shown by the eager sisters all over the house, he asked if Phœbe would walk up with him to the Holt. He had hoped his eldest son, who had ridden over with him, would have come in, and gone up with them, but he supposed Charlie had seized on him. (Poor Sir John, his attempt at match-making did not flourish.) However, he had secured Phœbe's most intense gratitude by his proposal, and down she came, a very pretty picture, in her dark brown dress, scarlet cloak, and round, brown felt hat, with the long, curly, brown feather tipped with scarlet, her favourite winter robin colouring. Her cheeks were brilliant, and her eyes not only brighter, but with a slight drooping that gave them the shadiness they sometimes wanted. And it was all from a ridiculous trepidation which made it well-nigh impossible to bring out what she was longing to say—'So you think Mr. Randolph like Mr. Charlecote.'

Fortunately he was beforehand with her, for both the likeness and the path through the pine woods reminded him strongly of his old friend, and he returned to the subject. 'So you are a great admirer of dear old Charlecote, Phœbe : you can't remember him ?'

'No, but Robert does, and I sometimes think I do.' (Then it came.) 'You think Mr. Randolph like him ?' Thanks to her hat, she could blush more comfortably now.

'I did not see him near. It was only something in air and figure. People inherit those things wonderfully. Now, my son Charlie sits on horseback exactly like his grandfather, whom he never saw ; and John——'

Oh ! was he going to run away on family likenesses ? Phœbe would not hear the 'and John ;' and observed, 'Mr. Charlecote was his godfather, was he not ?'

Which self-evident fact brought him back again to 'Yes ; and I only wish he had seen more of him ! These are his plantations, I declare, that he used to make so much of !'

'Yes, that is the reason Miss Charlecote is so fond of them.'

'Miss Charlecote ! When I think of him, I have no patience with her. I do believe he kept single all his life for her sake ; and why she never would have him, I never could guess. You ladies are very unreasonable sometimes, Phœbe.'

Phœbe tried to express a rational amount of wonder at poor Honor's taste, but grew incoherent in fear lest it should be irrational, and was rather frightened at finding Sir John looking at her with some amusement ; but he was only thinking of how willingly the poor little heiress of the Mervyns had once been thrown at Humfrey Charlecote's head ! But he went on to tell her of all that her hero had ever been to him and to the county, and of the blank his death had left, and never since supplied, till she felt more and more what a 'wise' man truly was !

No one was in the drawing-room, but Honor came down much more cheerful and lively than she had been for years, and calling Owen materially better—the doctors thought the injury to the head infinitely mitigated, and the first step to recovery fairly taken—there were good accounts of the Prendergasts, and all things seemed to be looking well. Presently Sir John, to Phœbe's great satisfaction, spoke of her guest, and his resemblance, but Honor answered with half-resentful surprise. Some of the old servants had made the same remark, but she could not understand it, and was evidently hurt by its recurrence. Phœbe sat on, listening to the account of Lucilla's letters, and the good spirits and health they manifested ; forcing herself not too obviously to watch door or window, and when Sir John was gone, she only offered to depart, lest Miss Charlecote should wish to be with Owen.

‘No, my dear, thank you; Mr. Randolph is with him, and he can read a little now. We are getting above the solitaire board, I assure you. I have fitted up the little room beyond the study for his bedroom, and he sits in the study, so there are no stairs, and he is to go out every day in a chair or the carriage.’

‘Does the little boy amuse him?’

‘No, not exactly, poor little fellow. They are terribly afraid of each other, that is the worst of it. And then we left the boy too long with the old woman. I hear his lessons for a quarter of an hour a-day, and he is a clever child enough; but his pronounciation and habits are an absolute distress, and he is not happy anywhere but in the housekeeper’s room. I try to civilize him, but as yet I cannot worry poor Owen. You can’t think how comfortable we are together, Phœbe, when we are alone. Since his sister went we have got on so much better. He was shy before her; but I must tell you, my dear, he asked me to read my Psalms and Lessons aloud, as I used to do; and we have had such pleasant evenings, and he desired that the servants might still come into prayers in the study. But then he always was different with me.’

And Phœbe, while assenting, could not silence a misgiving that she thought very cruel. She would believe Owen sincere if Humfrey Randolph did. Honor, however, was very happy, and presently begged her to come and see Owen. She obeyed with alacrity, and was conducted to the study. No Randolph was there, only pen, ink, paper, and algebra. But as she was greeting Owen, who looked much better and less oppressed, Honor made an exclamation, and from the window they saw the young man leaning over the sundial, partly studying its mysteries, partly playing with little Owen, who hung on him as an old play-mate.

‘Yes,’ said Owen, ‘he has taken pity on the boy—he is very good to him—has served an apprenticeship.’

Mr. Randolph looked up, saw Phœbe, gave a start of recognition and pleasure, and sped towards the house.

‘Yes, Phœbe, I do see *some* likeness,’ said Honor, as though a good deal struck and touched.

All the ridiculous and troublesome confusion was so good as to be driven away in the contentment of Humfrey Randolph’s presence, and the wondrous magnetic conviction that he was equally glad to be with her. She lost all restlessness, and was quite ready to amuse Owen by a lively discussion and comparison of the two weddings, but she so well knew that she should like to stay too long, that she cut her time rather over short, and would not stay to luncheon. This was not like the evenings that began with Hiawatha and ended at Lakeville, or on Lake Ontario; but one pleasure was in store for Phœbe. While she was finding her umbrella, and putting on her clogs, Humfrey Randolph ran down-stairs to her, and said, ‘I wanted to tell you something. My stepmother is going to be married.’

‘You are glad?’

‘Very glad. It is to a merchant whom she met at Buffalo, well off, and speaking most kindly of the little boys.’

‘That must be a great load off your mind.’

‘Indeed it is, though the children must still chiefly look to me. I should like to have little George at a good school. However, now their immediate maintenance is off my hands, I have more to spend in educating myself. I can get evening lessons now, when my day’s work is over.’

‘Oh! do not overstrain your head,’ said Phœbe, thinking of Bertha.

‘Heads can bear a good deal when they are full of hope,’ he said, smiling.

‘Still after your out of doors life of bodily exercise, do you not find it hard to be always shut up in London.’

‘Perhaps the novelty has not worn off. It is as if life had only begun since I came into the city.’

‘A new set of faculties called into play?’

‘Faculties—yes and everything else.’

‘I must go now, or my sisters will be waiting for me, and I see your dinner coming in. Good-bye.’

‘May I come to see you?’

‘O yes, pray let me show you our cottage.’

‘When may I come?’

‘To-morrow, I suppose.’

She felt, rather than saw him watching her all the way from the garden-gate to the wood. That little colloquy was the sunshiny point in her day. Had the tidings been communicated in the full circle, it would have been as nothing compared with their reservation for her private ear, with the marked ‘I wanted to tell *you*.’ Then she came home, looked at Maria threading holly-berries, and her heart fainted within her. There were moments when poor Maria would arise before her as a hardship and an infliction, and then she became terrified, prayed against such feelings as a crime, and devoted herself to her sister with even more than her wonted patient tenderness.

The certainty that the visit would take place kept her from all flutterings and self-debate, and in due time “Mr. Randolph” arrived. Anxiously did Phoebe watch for his look at Maria, for Bertha’s look at him, and she was pleased with both. His manner to Maria was full of gentleness, and Bertha’s quick eyes detected his intellect. He stood an excellent examination from her and Miss Fennimore upon the worn channel of Niagara, which had so often been used as a knockdown argument against Miss Charlecote’s cosmogony; and his bright terse powers of description gave them, as they agreed, a better idea of his woods than any travels which they had read.

It was no less interesting to observe his impression of the English village-life at Hiltonbury. To him, the aspect of the country had an air of exquisite miniature finish, wanting indeed in breadth and free-

dom, but he had suffered too much from vain struggling single-handed with Nature in her might, not to value the bounds set upon her ; and a man who knew by personal experience what it was to seek his whole live stock in an interminable forest, did not complain of the confinement of hedges and banks. Nay, the "hedgerow elms and hillocks green" were to him as classical as Whitehall ; he treated Maria's tame robins with as much respect as if they had been Howards or Percies ; holly and mistletoe were handled by him with reverential curiosity ; and the church and home of his ancestors filled him with a sweet loyal enthusiasm, more eager than in those to whom these things were familiar.

Miss Charlecote herself came in for some of these feelings. He admired her greatly in her Christmas aspect of Lady Bountiful, in which she well fulfilled old visions of the mistress of an English home, but still more did he dwell upon her gentleness, and on that shadowy resemblance to his mother, which made him long for some of that tenderness which she lavished upon Owen. He looked for no more than her uniformly kind civility and hospitality, but he was always wishing to know her better ; and any touch of warmth and affection in her manner towards him was so delightful that he could not help telling Phœbe of it, in their next brief *tête-à-tête*.

He was able to render a great service to Miss Charlecote. Mr. Brooks's understanding had not cleared with time, and the accounts that had been tangled in summer were by the end of the year in confusion worse confounded. He was a faithful servant, but his accounts had always been audited every month, and in his old age, his arithmetic would not carry him farther, so that his mistress's long absence abroad had occasioned such a hopeless chaos, that but for his long services, his honesty might have been in question. Honora put this idea away with angry horror. Not only did she love and trust the old man,

but he was a legacy from Humfrey, and she would have torn the page from her receipts rather than rouse the least suspicion against him. Yet she could not bear to leave any flaw in Humfrey's farm books, and she toiled and perplexed herself in vain; till Owen, finding out what distressed her, and grieving at his own incapacity, begged that Randolph might help her; when behold! the confused accounts arranged themselves in comprehensible columns, and poor old Brooks was proved to have cheated himself so much more than his lady as to be entirely exonerated from all but puzzle-headedness. The young man's farmer life qualified him to be highly popular at the Holt. He was curious about English husbandry, talked to the labourers, and tried their tools with no unpractised hand, even with the flail which Honor's hatred of steam still kept as the winter's employment in the barn; he appreciated the bullocks, criticized the sheep, and admired the pigs, till the farming men agreed "there had not been such an one about the place since the Squire himself."

Honora might be excused for not having detected a likeness between the two Humfreys. Scarcely a feature was in the same mould, the complexion was different, and the heavily built, easy going Squire, somewhat behind his own century, had apparently had nothing in common with the brisk modern colonial engineer, yet still there was something curiously recalling the expression of open honesty, and the whole cast of countenance, as well as the individuality of voice, air, and gestures, and the perception grew upon her so much in the haunts of her cousin, where she saw his attitudes and habits unconsciously repeated, that she was almost ready to accept Bertha's explanation that it was owing to the influence of the Christian name that both shared. But as it had likewise been borne by the wicked disinherited son who ran away, the theory was somewhat halting.

Phœbe's intercourse with Humfrey the younger was

much more fragmentary than in town, and therefore, perhaps, the more delicious. She saw him on most of the days of his fortnight's stay, either in the mutual calls of the two houses, in chance meetings in the village, or in walks to or from the holy day services at the church, and these afforded many a moment in which she was let into the deeper feelings that his first English Christmas excited. It was not conventional Christmas weather, but warm and moist, thus rendering the contrast still stronger with the sleighing of his prosperous days, the snow-shoe walk of his poorer ones. A frost hard enough for skating was the prime desire of Maria and Bertha, who both wanted to see the art practised by one to whom it was familiar. The frost came at last, and became reasonably hard in the first week of the new year, one day when Phœbe, to her regret, was forced to drive to Elverslope to fulfil some commissions for Mervyn and Cecily, who were expected at home on the 8th of January, after a Christmas at Sutton.

However, she had a reward. 'I do think,' said Miss Fennimore to her, as she entered the drawing-room, 'that Mr. Randolph is the most good-natured man in the world! For full three-quarters of an hour this afternoon did he hand Maria up and down a slide on the pond at the Holt!'

'You went up to see him skate?'

'Yes; he was to teach Bertha. We found him helping the little Sandbrook to slide, but when we came he sent him in with the little maid, and gave Bertha a lesson, which did not last long, for she grew nervous. Really her nerves will never be what they were! Then Maria begged for a slide, and you know what any sort of monotonous bodily motion is to her; there is no getting her to leave off, and I never saw anything like the spirit and good nature with which he complied.'

'He is *very* kind to Maria,' said Phœbe.

'He seems to have that sort of pitying respect which you first put into my mind towards her.'

‘Oh, are you come home, Phœbe?’ said Maria, running into the room. ‘I did not hear you. I have been sliding on the ice all the afternoon with Mr. Randolph. It is so nice, and he says we will do it again to-morrow.’

‘Ha, Phœbe!’ said Bertha, meeting her on the stairs, ‘do you know what you missed?’

‘Three children sliding on the ice,’ quoted Phœbe.

‘Seeing how a man that is called Humfrey can bear with your two sisters making themselves ridiculous. Really I should set the backwoods down as the best school of courtesy, but that I believe some people have that school within themselves. Hollo!’

For Phœbe absolutely kissed Bertha as she went up-stairs.

‘Ha?’ said Bertha, interrogatively; then went into the drawing-room, and looked very grave, almost sad.

Phœbe could not but think it rather hard when, on the last afternoon of Humfrey Randolph’s visit, there came a note from Mervyn ordering her up to Beauchamp to arrange some especial contrivances of his for Cecily’s morning room—her mother’s, which gave it an additional pang. It was a severe, threatening, bitterly cold day, not at all fit for sliding, even had not both the young ladies and Miss Fennimore picked up a suspicion of cold; but Phœbe had no doubt that there would be a farewell visit, and did not like to lose it.

‘Take the pony carriage, and you will get home faster,’ said Bertha, answering what was unspoken.

No; the groom sent in word that the ponies were gone to be rough-shod, and that one of them had a cold.

‘Never mind,’ said Phœbe, cheerfully; ‘I shall be warmer walking.’

And she set off, with a lingering will, but a step brisk under her determination that her personal wishes should never make her neglect duty or kindness. She

did not like to think that he would be disappointed, but she had a great trust in *his* trust in herself, and a confidence, not to be fretted away, that some farewell would come to pass, and that she should know when to look for him again.

Scanty sleety flakes of snow were falling before her half-hour's walk was over, and she arrived at the house, where anxious maids were putting their last touches of preparation for the mistress. It was strange not to feel more strongly the pang of a lost home; and had not Phœbe been so much preoccupied, perhaps it would have affected her strongly, with all her real joy at Cecily's installation; but there were new things before her that filled her mind too full for regrets for the rooms where she had grown up. She only did her duty scrupulously by Cecily's writing-table, piano, and pictures, and then satisfied the housekeeper by a brief inspection of the rooms, more laudatory than particular. She rather pitied Cecily, after her comfortable parsonage, for coming to all those state drawing-rooms. If it had been the west wing, now!

By this time the snow was thicker, and the park beginning to whiten. The housekeeper begged her to wait and order out the carriage, but she disliked giving trouble, and thought that an unexpected summons might be tardy of fulfilment, so she insisted on confronting the elements, confident in her cloak and India-rubber boots, and secretly hoping that the visitor at the cottage might linger on into the twilight.

As she came beyond the pillars of the portico, such a whirl of snow met her that she almost questioned the prudence of her decision, when a voice said, 'It is only the drift round the corner of the house.'

'You here?'

'Your sister gave me leave to come and see you home through the snow-storm.'

'Oh, thank you! This is the first time you have been here,' she added, feeling as if her first words had been too eagerly glad.

‘Yes, I have only seen the house from a distance before. I did not know how large it was. Which part did you inhabit?’

‘There—the west wing—shut up now, poor thing!’

‘And where was the window where you saw the horse and cart? Yes, you see I know that story; which was your window?’

‘The nearest to the main body of the house. Ah! it is a dear old window. I have seen many better things from it than that!’

‘What kind of things?’

‘Sunsets and moonsets, and the Holt firs best of all.’

‘Yes, I know better now what you meant by owing all to Miss Charlecote,’ he said, smiling. ‘I owe something to her, too.’

‘Oh, is she going to help you on?’ cried Phœbe.

‘No, I do not need that. What I owe to her is—knowing you.’

It had come, then! The first moment of full assurance of what had gleamed before; and yet the shock, sweet as it was, was almost pain, and Phœbe’s heart beat fast, and her downcast look betrayed that the full force of his words—and still more, of his tone—had reached her.

‘May I go on?’ he said. ‘May I dare to tell you what you are to me? I knew, from the moment we met, that you were what I had dreamt of—different, but better.’

‘I am sure I knew that you were!’ escaped from Phœbe softly, but making her face burn, as at what she had not meant to say.

‘Then you can bear with me? You do not forbid me to hope.’

‘Oh! I am a great deal too happy!’

There came a great wailing, driving gust of storm at that moment, as if it wanted to sweep them off their feet, but it was a welcome blast, for it was the occasion of a strong arm being flung round Phœbe, to restrain that fluttering cloak. ‘Storms shall only blow us

nearer together, dearest,' he said, with recovered breath, as, with no unwilling hand, she clung to his arm for help.

'If it be God's will,' said Phœbe, earnestly.

'And indeed,' he said, fervently, 'I have thought and debated much whether it were His will; whether it could be right, that I, with my poverty and my burthens, should thrust myself into your wealthy and sheltered life. At first, when I thought you were a poor dependent, I admitted the hope. I saw you spirited, helpful, sensible, and I dared to think that you were of the stuff that would gladly be independent, and would struggle on and up with me, as I have known so many do in my own country.'

'Oh! would I not?'

'Then I found how far apart we stand in one kind of social scale, and perhaps that ought to have overthrown all hope; but, Phœbe, it will not do so! I will not ask you to share want and privation, but I will and do ask you to be the point towards which I may work, the best earthly hope set before me.'

'I am glad,' said Phœbe, 'that you knew too well to think there was any real difference. Indeed, the superiority is all yours, except in mere money. And mine, I am sure, need not stand in the way, but there is one thing that does.'

'What? Your brothers?'

'I do not know. It is my sister Maria. I promised long ago that nothing should make me desert her;' and, with a voice faltering a little, but endeavouring to be firm, 'a promise to fulfil a duty appointed by Providence must not be repented of when the cost is felt.'

'But why should you think of deserting her?' he said. 'Surely I may help to bear your cares; and there is something so good, so gentle and loveable about her, that she need be no grievance. I shall have to bring my little brothers about you, too, so we shall be even,' he added, smiling.

‘Then,’ she said, looking in his face as beginning to take counsel with him, ‘You think it is right to assume a new tie that must have higher claims than the prior one that Heaven sent me.’

‘Nay, dearest, is not the new one instituted by Heaven? If I promise that I will be as entirely Maria’s brother as you are her sister, and will reverence her affliction, or more truly her innocence, in the same way, will you not trust her, as well as yourself with me?’

‘Trust, oh! indeed I do, and am thankful. But I am thinking of you! Poor dear Maria might be a drag, where I should not! And I cannot leave her to any of the others. She could not be long without me.’

‘Well, faithless one, we may have to wait the longer; though I feel that you alone would be happiest fighting up the hill with me.’

‘Oh, thank you for knowing that so well.’

‘But as we both have these ties, and as besides, I should be a shabby adventurer to address you but on equal terms, we must be content to wait till—as with God’s blessing I trust to do—I have made a home smooth enough for Maria as well as for you! Will that do, Phœbe?’

‘Somehow it seems too much,’ murmured Phœbe; ‘and yet I knew it of you.’

‘And as you both have means of your own, it may bring the time nearer,’ he said. ‘There, you see I can calculate on your fortune, though I still wish it were out of the way.’

‘If it were not for Maria, I should.’

‘And now, with this hope and promise, I feel as if, even if it were seven years, they would be like so many days,’ said Humfrey. ‘You will not be of those, my Phœbe, who suffer and are worn by a long engagement?’

‘One cannot tell without a trial,’ said Phœbe; ‘but indeed I do not see why security and rest, or

even hope deferred, should hurt me. Surely, having a right to think about you cannot do so ?'

And her look out of those honest clear grey eyes was one of the most perfect reliance and gladness.

'May I be worthy of those thoughts !' he fervently said. 'And you will write to me—even when I go back to the Ottawa ?'

'I shall be so glad to tell you everything, and have your letters ! Oh ! no, with them I am not going to pine'—and her strong young nature laughed at the folly.

'And while God gives me strength, we will not be afraid,' he answered. 'Phœbe, I looked at the last chapter of Proverbs last night, and thought you were like that woman of strength and skill on whose "lips is the law of kindness." And "you are not afraid of the snow," as if to complete the likeness.

'I did not quite know it was snowing. I like it, for it suits your country.'

'I like it, because you are as clear, firm, and pure, as my own clear crystal ice,' he said ; 'only not quite so cold ! And now, what remains ? Must your brothers be consulted ?' he added, reluctantly.

'It will be right that I should tell them,' said Phœbe. 'From Robert I could not keep such a thing, and Mervyn has a right to know. I cannot tell how he may take it, but I do not think that I owe him such implicit obedience as if he were my father. And by the time you really ask for me, you know you are to be such a rising engineer that they are all to be almost as proud of you as I am !'

'God helping me,' he gravely answered, his eyes raised upwards, and as it were carrying with them the glance that had sought them in almost playful confidence.

And thus they looked forth upon this life. Neither was so young as not to be aware of its trials. She knew the sorrows of suspense, bereavement, and family disunion ; and he, before his twenty-fourth year, had

made experience of adversity, uncongeniality, disappointment, and severe—almost hopeless—everyday labour. It was not in the spirit of those who had not braced on their armour, but of those who had made proof of it, that they looked bravely and cheerfully upon the battle, feeling their strength doubled as faithful companions-in-arms, and willing in that strength and trust to bear patiently with the severest trial of all—the delay of their hopes. The cold but bracing wind, the snow driving and whirling round them in gusts, could not daunt nor quench their spirits—nay, rather gave them additional vigour and enjoyment, while even the tokens of the tempest that they bore away were of perfect dazzling whiteness.

Never was shelter less willingly attained than when the park wicket of the Underwood was reached, just as the early twilight was becoming darkness. It was like a foretaste for Phœbe of seeing him go his own way in the storm while she waited safely housed; but they parted with grave, sweet smiles, and a promise that he would snatch a moment's farewell on the morrow. Phœbe would rather not have been met by Bertha at the front door, in some solicitude—‘You are come at last! Are you wet?—are you cold?’

‘Oh, no, thank you! Don't stand in the draught,’ said Phœbe, anxious to shake her off; but it was not to be done. Bertha preceded her up-stairs, talking all the way in something of her old mischievous whisper. ‘Am I in disgrace with you, too, Phœbe? Miss Fenimore says I have committed an awful breach of propriety; but really I could not leave you to the beating of the pitiless storm alone. I am afraid Malta's sagacity and little paws would hardly have sufficed to dig you out of a snow-drift before life was extinct. Are you greatly displeased with me, Phœbe? And, being by this time in the bedroom, she faced about, shut the door, and looked full at her sister.

‘No—no—dear Bertha, not displeased in the least; only if you would go——’

‘Now, Phœbe, indeed that is not kind of you,’ said Bertha, pleadingly, but preparing to obey.

‘No, Bertha, it is not,’ said Phœbe, recovering herself in a moment. ‘I am sorry for it ; but oh ! don’t you know the feeling of wanting to have one’s treasure all to oneself for a little moment before showing it ? No, don’t go ;’ and the two sisters flung their arms round one another. ‘You shall hear now.’

‘No, no,’ said Bertha, kissing her ; ‘my time for obtrusive, childish curiosity is over ! I only was so anxious ;’ and she looked up with tearful eyes, and almost the air of an elder sister. Phœbe might well requite the look with full-hearted tenderness and caresses, as she said, calmly, ‘Yes, Bertha, I am very happy.’

‘You ought to be,’ said Bertha, seriously.

‘Yes,’ said Phœbe, taking the *ought* in a different sense from what she meant ; ‘he is all, and more than I ever thought a man wise in true wisdom should be.’

‘And a man of progress, full of the dignity of labour,’ said Bertha. ‘I am glad he is not an old bit of county soil like John Raymond ! My dear Phœbe, Sir John will tear his hair !’

‘For shame, Bertha !’

‘Well, I will not tease you with my nonsense ; but you know it is the only thing that keeps tears out of one’s eyes. I see you want to be alone. Dear Phœbe !’ and she clung to her neck for a moment.

‘An instant more, Bertha. You see everything, I know ; but has Miss Fennimore guessed ?’

‘No, my dear, I do not think any such syllogism has ever occurred to her as, Lovers look conscious ; Phœbe looks conscious ; therefore Phœbe is in love ! It is defective in the major, you see, so it could not enter her brain.’

‘Then, Bertha, do not let any one guess it. I shall speak to Mervyn to-morrow, and write to Robin. It is their due, but no one else must know it—no, not for a long time—years perhaps.’

‘You do not mean to wait for years?’

‘We must.’

‘Then what’s the use of having thirty thousand pounds?’

‘No, Bertha, it would not be like him to be content with owing all to my fortune, and beginning life in idleness. It would be just enough to live on, with none of the duties of property, and that would never do! I could not wish it for him, and he has his brothers to provide for.’

‘Well, let him work for them, and have your money to make capital! Really, Phœbe, I would not lose such a chance of going out and seeing those glorious Lakes!’

‘I have Maria to consider.’

‘Maria! And why are you to be saddled with Maria?’

‘Because I promised my mother—I promised myself—I promised Mervyn, that she should be my care. I have told him of that promise, and he accepts it most kindly.’

‘You cannot leave her to me? Oh! Phœbe, do you still think me as hateful as I used to be?’

‘Dear, dear Bertha, I have full trust in your affection for her; but I undertook the charge, and I cannot thrust it on to another, who might——’

‘Don’t say that, Phœbe,’ cried Bertha, impetuously, ‘I am the one to have her! I who certainly never can, never shall, marry—I who am good for nothing but to look after her. Say you do not think me unworthy of her, Phœbe.’

‘I say no such thing,’ said Phœbe, affectionately, ‘but there is no use in discussing the matter. Dear Bertha, leave me, and compose yourself.’

Truly, during that evening Bertha was the agitated one, her speech much affected, and her gestures restless while Phœbe sat over her work, her needle going swiftly and evenly, and her eyes beaming with her quiet depth of thankful bliss.

In the morning, again, it was Bertha who betrayed an uneasy restlessness, and irrepressible desire to banish Miss Fennimore and Maria from the drawing-room, till the governess, in perplexity, began to think of consulting Phœbe whether a Jack Hastings affair could be coming over again.

Phœbe simply trusted to the promise, and went about her morning's avocations with a heart at rest, and when at last Humfrey Randolph did hurry in for a few moments, before he must rush back to the Holt, her greeting was so full of reliance and composure that Miss Fennimore perceived nothing. Bertha, however, rested not. As well as she could, under a fearful access of stammering, she insisted that Mr. Randolph should come into the dining-room to look at a—a—a—a—a——,

'Ah well!' thought Miss Fennimore, 'Phœbe is gone, too, so she will keep guard.'

If Miss Fennimore could have looked through the door, she would have seen the astonished Maria pounced upon, as if in sport, pulled upstairs, and desired by Bertha to find her book of dried flowers to show Mr. Randolph. Naughty Bertha, who really did not believe the dried flowers had ever been brought home from Woolstone Lane! It served the manœuvrer right, that Maria, after one look at the shelves, began to cry out for Phœbe to come and find them. But it signified the less since the lovers had not left the hall, and had exchanged all the words that there was time for before Bertha, at the sound of the re-opening door, flew down to put her hand into Humfrey's and grasp it tightly, looking in his face instead of speaking. 'Thank you,' he said, returning the pressure, and was gone. 'We improve as we go on. Number three is the best of my brothers-in-law, Phœbe,' said Bertha, lightly. Then leaving Phœbe to pacify Maria about the flowers, she went into her own room, and cried bitterly and overpoweringly.



CHAPTER XIX.

Thekla. I should love thee.

Whate'er thou hadst chosen, thou wouldst still have acted
Nobly and worthy of thee ; but repentance
Shall ne'er disturb thy soul's fair peace.

Max. Then I must leave thee ; must part from thee !

Thekla. Being faithful

To thine own self, thou art faithful too to me.

Wallenstein.

PHŒBE and Maria went alone to the Park to receive the bridal pair, for poor Bertha was so nervous and unhinged as not even to wish to leave the fireside. It was plain that she must not be deprived of an elder sister's care, and that it would be unlikely that she would ever have nerve enough to undertake the charge of Maria, even if Phœbe could think of shifting the responsibility, or if a feeble intellect could be expected to yield the same deference to a younger sister as came naturally to an elder one.

Thus Phœbe's heart was somewhat heavy as she braced herself for her communication to Mervyn, doubtful as to the extent of his probable displeasure, but for that very cause resolved on dealing openly from the first, while satisfied that, at her age, his right was rather to deference than to surrender of judgment. Maria roamed through the house, exclaiming at the alterations, and Phœbe sat still in the concentrated, resolute stillness that was her form of suspense.

They came ! The peals of the Hiltonbury bells

rung merrily in the cold air, the snow sparkled bridally, the icicles glittered in the sunset light, the workpeople stood round the house to cheer the arrival, and the sisters hurried out.

It was no more the pale, patient face! The cheeks were rounded, the brown eyes smiled, the haggard air, that even as a bride Cecily had worn, was entirely gone, and Mervyn watched exultingly Phœbe's surprise at what he had made of the wan, worn girl they had met at Hyères. The only disappointment was Bertha's absence, and there was much regret that the newcomers had not heard of her cold so as to have seen her at the Underwood on their way. They had spent the previous day in town in going over the distillery, by Cecily's particular wish, and had afterwards assisted at a grand impromptu entertainment of all the workpeople, at their own expense and Robert's trouble. Mervyn did certainly seem carried out of his own knowledge of himself, and his wife had transgressed every precedent left by his mother, who had never beheld Whittingtonia in her life!

Phœbe found their eager talk so mazy and indistinct to her perception that she became resolved to speak and clear her mind at the first opportunity; so she tarried behind, when Cecily went up, under Maria's delighted guidance, to take off her bonnet, and accosted Mervyn with the ominous words, 'I want to speak to you.'

'Make haste, then; there is Cecily left to Maria.'

'I wanted to tell you that I am engaged.'

'The deuce you are!'

'To Mr. Randolph, Miss Charlecote's Canadian cousin.'

Mervyn, who had expected no less than John Raymond, whirled round in indignant surprise, and looked incredulously at her, but was confronted by her two open, unabashed eyes, as she stood firm on both her feet, and continued: 'I have been thrown a good deal with him, so as to learn his goodness and superiority. I know you will think it a very bad match, for he has

nothing but his hands and head ; but we mean to wait till he can offer what are considered as equal terms. We thought it right you should know.'

'Upon my word, that's a clever fellow !'

Phœbe knew very well that this was ironical, but would not so reply. 'He has abilities,' she said, 'and we are ready to wait till he has made proof of them.'

'Well, what now ?' he cried in despair. 'I *did* think you the sensible one of the lot.'

'When you know him,' she said, with her fearless smile, 'you will own that I *was* sensible there !'

'Really, the child looks so complacent that she would outface me that this mad notion was a fine thing ! I declare it is worse than Bertha's business ; and you so much older ! At least Hastings was a man of family, and this is a Yankee adventurer picked out of the back of a ditch by that young dog, Sandbrook. Only a Yankee could have had the impudence ! I declare you are laughing all the time. What have you to say for yourself ?'

'His father was major in the —th dragoons, and was one of the Randolfs of —shire. His mother was a Charlecote. His birth is as good as our own, and you saw that he is a gentleman. His character and talents have gained his present situation, and it is a profession that gives every opening for ability ; nor does he ask for me till his fortune is made.'

'But hinders you from doing better ! Pray, what would Augusta say to you ?' he added, jocosely, for even while lashing himself up, his tone had been placable.

'He shall satisfy her.'

'How long has this been going on ?'

'We only spoke of it yesterday. Bertha found it out ; but I wish no one else to know it except Robert.'

'Somehow she looks so cool, and she is so entirely the last girl I expected to go crazy, that I can't laugh at the thing as I ought ! I say, what's this about Miss Charlecote ; will she do anything for him ?'

'I believe not.'

‘And pray who vouches for his antecedents, such as they are.’

‘Mr. Currie and Owen Sandbrook both know the whole.’

‘Is Sandbrook at the Holt?’

‘Yes,’ answered Phœbe, suppressing her strong distaste against bringing him into the affair.

‘Well, I shall make inquiries, and—and—it is a horrid unlucky business, and the old girl should be scarified for putting you in his way. The end will be that you’ll marry on your own means, and be pinched for life. Now, look here, you are no fool at the bottom; you will give it up if I find that he is no go.’

‘If it be proved that I ought,’ said Phœbe. ‘And if you find him what I have told you, you will make no opposition. Thank you, Mervyn.’

‘Stay,’ said he, laughing, and letting her kiss him, ‘I have made no promises, mind!’

The confidence that Phœbe had earned had stood her in good stead. Mervyn had great trust in her judgment, and was too happy besides for severity on other people’s love. Nor were her perfect openness, and fearless though modest independence, without effect. She was not one who invited tyranny, but truly ‘queen o’er herself,’ she ruled herself too well to leave the reins loose for others to seize.

The result of the interview had surpassed her hopes, and she had nothing to regret but her brother’s implied purpose of consulting Owen Sandbrook. Friend of Humfrey though he were, she could not feel secure of his generosity, and wished the engineer had been the nearer referee; but she did not say so, as much for shame at her own uncharitableness, as for fear of rousing Mervyn’s distrust; and she was afraid that her injunctions to secrecy would be disregarded. Fully aware that all would be in common between the husband and wife, she was still taken by surprise when Cecily, coming early next day to the Underwood to

see Bertha, took her aside to say, 'Dearest, I hope this is all right, and for your happiness.'

'You will soon know that it is,' said Phœbe, brightly.

'Only, my dear, it must not be a long engagement. Ah! you think that nothing now, but I could not bear to think that *you* were to go through a long attachment.'

Was this forgiving Cecily really fancying that her sorrows had been nothing worse than those incidental to a long attachment?

'Ah!' thought Phœbe, 'if she could ever have felt the full reliance on which I can venture, she need never have drooped! What is time to trust?'

Mervyn kept his word, and waiving ceremony, took his wife at once to the Holt, and leaving her with Miss Charlecote, made a visit to Owen in the study, wishing, in the first place, to satisfy himself of the young man's competence to reply to his questions. On this he had no doubt; Owen had made steady progress ever since he had been in England, and especially during the quiet time that had succeeded his sister's marriage. His mental powers had fully regained their keenness and balance, and though still incapable of sustained exertion of his faculties, he could talk as well as ever, and the first ten minutes convinced Mervyn that he was conversing with a shrewd sensible observer, who had seen a good deal of life, and of the world. He then led to the question about young Randolph, endeavouring so to frame it as not to betray the occasion of it.

The reply fully confirmed all that Phœbe had averred. The single efforts of a mere youth, not eighteen at the time of his father's failure, without capital, and set down in a wild uncleared part of the bush, had of course been inadequate to retrieve the ruined fortunes of the family; but he had shown wonderful spirit, patience, and perseverance, and the duteous temper in which he had borne the sacrifice of his prospects by his father's foolish speculations and unsuitable marriage, his affectionate treatment of the

wife and children when left on his hands, and his cheerful endurance of the severest and most hopeless drudgery for the bare support of life, had all been such as to inspire the utmost confidence in his character. Of his future prospects, Owen spoke with a sigh almost of envy. His talent and industry had already made him a valuable assistant to Mr. Currie, and an able engineer had an almost certain career of prosperity open to him. Lastly, Mervyn asked what was the connexion with Miss Charlecote, and what possibilities it held out. Owen winced for a moment, then explained the second cousinship, adding, however, that there was no entail, that the disposal of Miss Charlecote's property was entirely in her own power, and that she had manifested no intention of treating the young man with more than ordinary civility, in fact that she had rather shrunk from acknowledging his likeness to the family. His father's English relatives had, in like manner, owned him as a kinsman; but had shown no alacrity in making friends with him. The only way to be noticed, as the two gentlemen agreed, when glad to close their conference in a laugh, is to need no notice.

'Uncommon hard on a fellow,' soliloquized Owen, when left alone. 'Is it not enough to have one's throat cut, but must one do it with one's own hands? It is a fine thing to be magnanimous when one thinks one is going off the stage, but quite another thing when one is to remain there. I'm no twelfth century saint, only a nineteenth century beggar, with an unlucky child on my hands! Am I to give away girl, land, and all to the fellow I raked out of his swamps? Better have let him grill and saved my limbs! And pray what more am I to do? I've introduced him, made no secret of his parentage, puffed him off, and brought him here, and pretty good care he takes of himself! Am I to pester poor Honey if she does prefer the child she bred up to a stranger? No, no, I've done my part; let him look out for himself!'

Mervyn allowed to Phœbe that Randolph was no impostor, but warned her against assuming his consent. She suspected that Owen at least guessed the cause of these inquiries, and it kept her aloof from the Holt. When Miss Charlecote spoke of poor Owen's want of spirits, discretion told her that she was not the person to enliven him; and the consciousness of her secret made her less desirous of confidences with her kind old friend, so that her good offices chiefly consisted in having little Owen to the Underwood to play with Maria, who delighted in his society, and unconsciously did much for his improvement.

Honor herself perceived that Phœbe's visits only saddened her convalescent, and that in his present state he was happiest with no one but her, who was more than ever a mother to him. They were perfectly at ease together, as she amused him with the familiar books, which did not strain his powers like new ones, the quiet household talk, the little playful exchanges of tender wit, and the fresh arrangement of all her museum on the natural system, he having all the entertainment, and she all the trouble, till her conversion astonished Bertha. The old religious habits of the Holt likewise seemed to soothe and give him pleasure; but whether by force of old association, or from their hold on his heart, was as yet unknown to Honora, and perhaps to himself. It was as if he were deferring all demonstration till he should be able again to examine the subject with concentrated attention. Or it might be that, while he shrank from exerting himself upon Randolph's behalf, he was not ready for repentance, and therefore distrusted, and hung back from, the impulses that would otherwise have drawn him to renew all that he had once cast aside. He was never left alone without becoming deeply melancholy, yet no companionship save Honor's seemed to suit him for many minutes together. His brain was fast recovering the injury, but it was a trying convalescence; and with returning health, his

perfect helplessness fretted him under all the difficulties of so tall and heavy a man being carried from bed to sofa, from sofa to carriage.

‘Poor Owen!’ said Phœbe to herself, one day when she had not been able to avoid witnessing this pitiable spectacle of infirmity; ‘I can’t think why I am always fancying he is doing Humfrey and me some injustice, and that he knows it. He, who brought Humfrey home, and has praised him to Mervyn! It is very uncharitable of me, but why will he look at me as if he were asking my pardon? Well, we shall see the result of Mervyn’s inspection!’

Mervyn and his wife were going for two nights to the rooms at the office, in the first lull of the bridal invitations, which were infinitely more awful to Cecily than to Phœbe. After twenty-nine years of quiet clerical life, Cecily neither understood nor liked the gaieties even of the county, had very little to say, and, unless her aunt were present, made Phœbe into a protector, and retired behind her, till Phœbe sometimes feared that Mervyn would be quite provoked, and remember his old dread lest Cecily should be too homely and bashful for her position. Poor dear Cecily! She was as good and kind as possible; but in the present close intercourse it sometimes would suggest itself to Phœbe, ‘was she quite as wise as she was good?’

And Miss Fennimore, with still clearer eyes, in wardly decided that, though religion should above all form the morals, yet the morality of common sense and judgment should be cultivated with an equal growth.

Cecily returned from London radiant with sisterly congratulation, in a flutter of delight with Mr. Randolph, and intimating a glorious project in the background, devised between herself and Mervyn, then guarding against possible disappointment by declaring it might be all her own fancy.

The meaning of these prognostics appeared the next morning. Mervyn had been much impressed by

Humfrey Randolph's keen business-like appearance and sensible conversation, as well as by Mr. Currie's opinion of him ; and, always detesting the trouble of his own distillery, it had occurred to him that to secure an active working partner, and throw his sister's fortune into the business, would be a most convenient, generous, and brotherly means of smoothing the course of true love ; and Cecily had been so enchanted at the happiness he would thus confer, that he came to the Underwood quite elevated with his own kindness.

Phœbe heard his offer with warm thankfulness, but could not answer for Humfrey.

‘He has too much sense not to take a good offer,’ said Mervyn, ‘otherwise, it is all humbug his pretending to care for you. As to Robert's folly, have not I given up all that any rational being could stick at. I tell you, it is the giving up those houses that makes me in want of capital, so you are bound to make it up to me.’

Mervyn and Phœbe wrote by the same post. ‘I will be satisfied with whatever you decide upon as right, were Phœbe's words ; but she refrained from expressing any wish. What was the use of a wise man, if he were not to be let alone to make up his mind ? She would trust to him to divine what it would be to her to be thus one with her own family, and to gain him without losing her sisters. The balance must not be weighted by a woman's hand, when ready enough to incline to her side ; and why should she add to his pain, if he must refuse ?

How ardently she wished, however, can be imagined. She could not hide from herself pictures of herself and Humfrey, sometimes in London, sometimes at the Underwood, working with Robert, and carrying out the projects which Mervyn but half acted on, and a quarter understood.

The letter came, and the first line was decisive. In spite of earnest wishes and great regrets, Humfrey could not reconcile the trade to his sense of right. He

knew that as Mervyn conducted it, it was as unobjectionable as was possible, and that the works were admirably regulated ; but it was in going over the distillery as a curiosity he had seen enough to perceive that it was a line in which enterprise and exertion could only find scope by extending the demoralizing sale of spirits, and he trusted to Phœbe's agreeing with him, that when he already had a profession fairly free from temptation, it was his duty not to put himself into one that might prove more full of danger to him than to one who had been always used to it. He had not consulted Robert, feeling clear in his own mind, and thinking that he had probably rather not interfere.

Kind Humfrey ! That bit of consideration filled Phœbe's heart with grateful relief. It gave her spirits to be comforted by the tender and cheering words with which the edge of the disappointment was softened, and herself thanked for her abstinence from persuasion. 'Oh, better to wait seven years, with such a Humfrey as this in reserve, than to let him warp aside one inch of his sense of duty ! As high minded as dear Robert, without his ruggedness and harshness,' she thought as she read the manly, warm-hearted letter, to Mervyn, which he had enclosed, and which she could not help showing to Bertha.

It was lost on Bertha. She thought it dull and poor spirited not to accept, and manage the distillery just as he pleased. Any one could manage Mervyn, she said, not estimating the difference between a petted sister and a junior partner, and it was a new light to her that the trade—involving so much chemistry and mechanic ingenuity—was not good enough for anybody, unless they were peacocks too stupid to appreciate the dignity of labour ! For the first time Phœbe wished her secret known to Miss Charlecote, for the sake of her appreciation of his triumph of principle.

'This is Robert's doing !' was Mervyn's first exclamation, when Phœbe gave him the letter. 'If there be an intolerable plague in the world, it is the having a

fanatical fellow like that in the family. Nice requital for all I have thrown away for the sake of his maggots! I declare I'll resume every house I've let him have for his tomfooleries, and have a gin bottle blown as big as an ox as a sign for each of them.'

Phoebe had a certain lurking satisfaction in observing, when his malediction had run itself down, 'He never consulted Robert.'

'Don't tell me that! As if Robert had not run about with his mouth open, reviling his father's trade, and pluming himself on keeping out of it.'

'Mervyn, you know better! Robert has said no word against you! It is the facts that speak for themselves.'

'The facts? You little simpleton, do you imagine that we distil the juices of little babies?'

Phoebe laughed, and he added kindly, 'Come, little one, I know this is no doing of yours. You have stuck by this wicked distiller of vile liquids through thick and thin. Don't let the parson lead you nor Randolph by the nose; he is far too fine a fellow for that; but come up to town with me and Cecily, as soon as Lady Caroline's bear fight is over, and make him hear reason.'

'I should be very glad to go and see him, but I cannot persuade him.'

'Why not?'

'When a man has made up his mind, it would be wrong to try to over-persuade him, even if I believed that I could.'

'You know the alternative?'

'What?'

'Just breaking with him a little.'

She smiled.

'We shall see what Crabbe, and Augusta, and Acton will say to your taking up with a dumpy leveller. We shall have another row. And you'll all be broken up again!'

That was by far the most alarming of his threats;

but she did not greatly believe that he would bring it to pass, or that an engagement, however imprudent, conducted as hers had been, could be made a plea for accusing Miss Fennimore or depriving her of her sisters. She tried to express her thankfulness for the kindness that had prompted the original proposal, and her sympathy with his natural vexation at finding that a traffic which he had really ameliorated at considerable loss of profit, was still considered objectionable; but he silenced this at once as palaver, and went off to fetch his wife to try her arguments.

This was worse than Phœbe had expected! Cecily was too thorough a wife not to have adopted all her husband's interests, and had totally forgotten all the objections current in her own family against the manufacture of spirits. She knew that great opportunities of gain had been yielded up, and such improvements made as had converted the distillery into a model of its kind; she was very proud of it, wished every one to be happy, and Mervyn to be saved trouble, and thought the scruples injurious and overstrained. Phœbe would not contest them with her. What the daughter had learnt by degrees, might not be forced on the wife; and Phœbe would only protest against trying to shake a fixed purpose, instead of maintaining its grounds. So Cecily continued affectionately hurt, and unnecessarily compassionate, showing that a woman can hardly marry a person of tone inferior to her own without some deterioration of judgment, beneficial and elevating as her influence may be in the main.

Poor Cecily! she did the very thing that those acquainted with the ins and outs of the family had most deprecated! She dragged Robert into the affair, writing a letter, very pretty in wifely and sisterly goodwill, to entreat him to take Mr. Randolph in hand, and persuade him of the desirableness of the spirit manufacture in general, and that of the Fulmort house in particular.

The letter she received in return was intended to

be very kind, but was severely grave, in simply observing that what he had not thought fit to do himself, he could not persuade another to do.

Those words somehow acted upon Mervyn as bitter and ungrateful irony; and working himself up by an account, in his own colouring, of Robert's behaviour at the time of the foundation of St. Matthew's, he went thundering off to assure Phœbe that he *must* take an active partner, at all events; and that if she and Robert did not look out, he should find a moneyed man who knew what he was about, would clear off Robert's waste, and restore the place to what it had once been.

'What is your letter, Phœbe?' he asked, seeing an envelope in Robert's handwriting on her table.

Phœbe coloured a little. 'He has not said one word to Humfrey,' she said.

'And what has he said to you? The traitor, insulting me to my wife!'

Phœbe thought for one second, then resolved to take the risk of reading all aloud, considering that whatever might be the effect, it could not be worse than that of his surmises.

'Cecily has written to me, greatly to my surprise, begging for my influence with Randolph to induce him to become partner in the house. I understand by this that he has already refused, and that you are aware of his determination; therefore I have no scruple in writing to tell you that he is perfectly right. It is true that the trade, as Mervyn conducts it, is free from the most flagrant evils that deterred me from taking a share in it; and I am most thankful for the changes he has made.'

'You show it, don't you?' interjected Mervyn.

'I had rather see it in his hands than those of any other person, and there is nothing blameworthy in his continuance in it. But it is of questionable expedience, and there are still hereditary practices carried on, the harm of which he has not hitherto perceived, but which would assuredly shock a new comer such as Randolph.

You can guess what would be the difficulty of obtaining alteration, and acquiescence would be even more fatal. I do not tell you this as complaining of Mervyn, who has done and is doing infinite good, but to warn you against the least endeavour to influence Randolph. Depend upon it, even the accelerating your marriage would not secure your happiness if you saw your husband and brother at continual variance in the details of the business, and opposition might at any moment lead Mervyn to undo all the good he has effected.'

'Right enough there ;' and Mervyn, who had looked furious at several sentences, laughed at last. 'I must get another partner, then, who can and will manage ; and when all the gin-palaces are more splendid than ever, what will you and the parson say ?'

'That to do a little wrong in hopes of hindering another from doing worse, never yet succeeded !' said Phœbe, bravely.

She saw that the worst was over when he had come to that laugh, and that the danger of a quarrel between the brothers was averted. She did not know from how much terror and self-reproach poor Cecily was suffering, nor her multitudinous résolutions against kindly interferences upon *terra incognita*.

That fit of wrath subsided, and Mervyn neither looked out for his moneyed partner, nor fulfilled his threat of bringing the united forces of the family displeasure upon his sister. Still there was a cloud overshadowing the enjoyment, though not lessening the outward harmony of those early bridal days. The long, dark drives to the county gaieties, shut up with Mervyn and Cecily, were formidable by the mere existence of a topic, never mentioned, but always secretly dwelt on. And in spite of three letters a week, Phœbe was beginning to learn that trust does not fully make up to the heart for absence, by the distance of London to estimate that of Canada, and by the weariness of one month, the tedium of seven years !

'Yet,' said Bertha to Cecily, 'Phœbe is so stupidly

like herself now she is engaged, that it is no fun at all. Nobody would guess her to be in love ! If they cared for each other one rush, would not they have floated to bliss even on streams of gin ?

Cecily would not dispute their mutual love but she was not one of those who could fully understand the double force of that love which is second to love of principle. Obedience, not judgment, had been her safeguard, and, like most women, she was carried along, not by the abstract idea, but by its upholder.

Intuition, rather than what actually passed before her, showed Phœbe more than once that Cecily was sorely perplexed by the difference between the standard of Sutton and that of Beauchamp. Strict, scrupulous, and deeply devout, the clergyman's daughter suffered at every deviation from the practices of the Parsonage, made her stand in the wrong places, and while conscientiously and painfully fretting Mervyn about petty details, would be unknowingly carried over far greater stumbling-blocks. In her ignorance she would be distressed at habits which were comparatively innocent, and then fear to put forth her influence at the right moment. There was hearty affection on either side, and Mervyn was exceedingly improved, but more than once Phœbe saw in poor Cecily's harassed, puzzled, wistful face, and heard in her faltering remonstrances, what it was to have loved and married without perfect esteem and trust.



CHAPTER XX.

Get thee an ape, and trudge the land
The leader of a juggling band.

SCOTT.

MASTER HOWEN, Master Howen, you must not go up the best stairs.' 'But I will go up the best stairs. I don't like the nasty, dark, back stairs!' 'Let me take off your boots, then, sir; Mrs. Stubbs said she could not have such dirty marks——'

'I don't care for Mrs. Stubbs! I won't take my boots off! Get off—I'll kick you if you touch them! I shall go where I like! I'm a gentleman. I shall have hall the Olt for my very hown!'

'Master Howen! Oh my!'

For Flibbertigibbet's teeth were in the crack orphan's neck, and the foot that she had not seized kicking like a vicious colt, when a large hand seized him by the collar, and lifted him in mid-air; and the crack orphan, looking up as though the oft-invoked 'ugly man' of her infancy had really come to bear off naughty children, beheld for a moment, propped against the door-post, the tall figure and bearded head hitherto only seen on the sofa.

The next instant the child had been swung into the study, and the apparition, stumbling with one hand

and foot to the couch, said breathlessly to the frightened girl, 'I am sorry for my little boy's shameful behaviour ! Leave him here. Owen, stay.'

The child was indeed standing, as if powerless to move or even cry, stunned by his flight in the air, and dismayed at the terrific presence in which he was for the first time left alone. Completely roused and excited, the elder Owen sat upright, speaking not loud, but in tones forcible from vehement feeling.

'Owen, you boast of being a gentleman ! Do you know what we are ? We are beggars ! I can neither work for myself nor for you. We live on charity. That girl earns her bread—we do not ! We are beggars ! Who told you otherwise ?'

Instead of an answer, he only evoked a passion of frightened tears, so piteous, that he spoke more gently, and stretched out his hand ; but his son shook his frock at him in terror, and retreated out of reach, backwards into a corner, replying to his calls and assurances with violent sobs, and broken entreaties to go back to 'granma.'

At last, in despair, Owen lowered himself to the floor, and made the whole length of his person available ; but the child, in the extremity of terror at the giant crawling after him, shrieked wildly, and made a rush at the door, but was caught, and at once drawn within the grasp of the sweeping arm.

All was still. He was gathered up to the broad breast ; the hairy cheek was gently pressed against his wet one. It was a great, powerful, encircling caress that held him. There was a strange thrill in this contact between the father and son—a new sensation of intense loving pity in the one, a great but soothing awe in the other, as struggling and crying no more, he clung ever closer and closer, and drew the arm tighter round him.

'My poor little fellow !' And never had there been such sweetness in those deep, full tones.

The boy responded with both arms round his neck,

and face laid on his shoulder. Poor child ! it was the affection that his little heart had hungered for ever since he had left his grandmother, and which he had inspired in no one.

A few more seconds, and he was sitting on the floor, resting against his father, listening without alarm to his question—‘ Now, Owen, what were you saying ?’

‘ I’ll never do it again, pa—never !’

‘ No, never be disobedient, nor fight with girls. But what were you saying about the Holt ?’

‘ I shall live here—I shall have it for my own.’

‘ Who told you so ?’

‘ Granma.’

‘ Grandmamma knows nothing about it.’

‘ Sha’n’t I, then ?’

‘ Never ! Listen, Owen. This is Miss Charlecote’s house as long as she lives—I trust till long after you are a man. It will be Mr. Randolph’s afterwards, and neither you nor I have anything to do with it.’

The two great black eyes looked up in inquiring, disappointed intelligence. Then he said, in a satisfied tone—

‘ We aint beggars—we don’t carry rabbit-skins and lucifers !’

‘ We do nothing so useful or profitable,’ sighed poor Owen, striving to pull himself up by the table, but desisting on finding that it was more likely to overbalance than to be a support. ‘ My poor boy, you will have to work for me !’ and he sadly stroked down the light hair.

‘ Shall I ?’ said the little fellow. ‘ May I have some white mice ? I’ll bring you all the halfpence, pa !’

‘ Bring me a footstool, first of all. There—at this rate I shall be able to hop about on one leg, and be a more taking spectacle !’ said Owen, as dragging himself up by the force of hand and arm, he resettled himself on his couch, as much pleased as amazed at his first personal act of locomotion after seven months, and at

the discovery of recovered strength in the sound limbs. Although with the reserve of convalescence, he kept his exploit secret, his spirits visibly rose ; and whenever he was left alone, or only with his little boy, he repeated his experiments, launching himself from one piece of furniture to another ; and in spite of the continued deadness of the left side, feeling life, vigour, and hope returning on him.

His morbid shyness of his child had given way to genuine affection, and Owen soon found that he liked to be left to the society of Flibbertigibbet, or as he called him for short, Giblets, exacting in return the title of father, instead of the terrible 'pa.' Little Owen thought this a preparation for the itinerant white-mouse exhibition, which he was permitted to believe was only delayed till the daily gymnastic exertions should have resulted in the use of crutches, and till he could safely pronounce the names of the future mice, Hannibal and Annabella, and other traps for aspirates ! Nay, his father was going to set up an exhibition of his own, as it appeared ; for after a vast amount of meditation, he begged for pen and paper, ruler and compasses, drew, wrote, and figured, and finally took to cardboard and penknife, begging the aid of Miss Charlecote, greatly to the distress of the little boy, who had thought the whole affair private and confidential, and looked forward to a secret departure early in the morning, with crutches, mice, and model.

Miss Charlecote did her best with needle and gum, but could not understand ; and between her fears of trying Owen's patience and letting him overstrain his brain, was so much distressed that he gave it up ; but it preyed on him, till one day Phœbe came in, and he could not help explaining it to her, and claiming her assistance, as he saw her ready comprehension. For two afternoons she came and worked under him ; and between card, wire, gum, and watch-spring, such a beauteous little model locomotive engine and train were produced, that Owen archly assured her that

‘she would be a fortune in herself to a rising engineer,’ and Honor was struck by the sudden crimson evoked by the compliment.

Little Owen thought their fortune made, and was rather disappointed at the delay, when his father, confirming his idea that their livelihood might depend on the model, insisted that it should be carried out in brass and wood, and caused his chair to be frequently wheeled down to the blacksmith’s and carpenter’s, whose comprehension so much more resembled their lady’s than that of Miss Fulmort, and who made such intolerable blunders, that he bestowed on them more vituperation than, in their opinion, ‘he had any call to;’ and looked in a passion of despair at the numb, nerveless fingers, once his dexterous servants.

Still his spirits were immensely improved, since resolution, hope, and independence had returned. His mental faculties had recovered their force, and with the removal of the disease, the healthfulness and elasticity of his twenty-five years were beginning to compensate for the lost powers of his limbs. As he accomplished more, he grew more enterprising and less disinclined to show off his recovered powers. He first alarmed, then delighted Honor; begged for crutches, and made such good use of them, that Dr. Martin held out fair hopes of progress, though advising a course of rubbing and sea-air at Brighton.

Perhaps Honor had never been happier than during these weeks of improvement, with her boy so completely her own, and more than she had ever known him; his dejection lessening, his health returning, his playfulness brilliant, his filial fondness most engaging. She did not know the fixed resolution that actuated him, and revived the entire man! She did not know what was kept in reserve till confidence in his efficiency should dispose her to listen favourably. Meantime the present was so delightful to her that she trembled and watched lest she should be relapsing

into the old idolatry. The test would be whether she would put Owen above or below a clear duty.

The audit of farm-accounts before going to Brighton was as unsatisfactory as the last. Though not beyond her own powers of unravelling, they made it clear that Brooks was superannuated. It was piteous to see the old man seated in the study, racking his brains to recollect the transaction with Farmer Hodnet about seed-wheat and working oxen ; to explain for what the three extra labourers had been put on, and to discover his own meaning in charging twice over for the repairs of Joe Littledale's cottage ; angered and overset by his mistress's gentle cross-examination, and enraged into absolute disrespect when that old object of dislike, Mr. Sandbrook, looked over the books, and muttered suggestions under his moustache.

'Poor old man !' both exclaimed, as he left the room, and Honor sighed deeply over this failure of the last of the supports left her by Humfrey. 'I must pension him off,' she said. 'I hope it will not hurt his feelings much !' and then she turned away to her old-fashioned bureau, and applied herself to her entries in her farming-books, while Owen sat in his chair, dreamily caressing his beard, and revolving the proposition that had long been in his mind.

At last the tall, red book was shut, the pen wiped, the bureau locked, and Honor came back to her place by the table, and resumed her needlework. Still there was silence, till she began : 'This settles it ! I have been thinking about it ever since you have been so much better. Owen, what should you think of managing the property for me ?'

He only answered by a quick interrogative glance.

'You see,' she continued, 'by the help of Brooks, who knew his master's ways, I have pottered on, to my own wonderment ; but Brooks is past work, my downhill-time is coming, high farming has outrun us both, and I know that we are not doing as Humfrey

would wish by his inheritance. Now I believe that nothing could be of greater use to me, the people, or the place, than that you should be in charge. We could put some deputy under your control, and contrive for your getting about the fields. I would give you so much a year, so that your boy's education would be your own doing, and we should be so comfortable.'

Owen leant back, much moved, smiled and said, 'Thanks, dear Honor ; you are much too good to us.'

'Think about it, and tell me what would be right. Brooks has 100*l.* a year, but you will be worth much more, for you will develop all the resources, you know.'

'Best Honor, sweetest Honey,' said Owen, hastily, the tears rising to his eyes, 'I cannot bear to frustrate such kind plans, nor seem more ungrateful than I have been already. I will not live on you for nothing longer than I can help ; but indeed, this must not be.'

'Not ?'

'No. There are many reasons against it. In the first place, I know nothing of farming.'

'You would soon learn.'

'And vex your dear old spirit with steam-ploughs and haymaking machines.'

She smiled, as if from him she could endure even steam.

'Next, such an administration would be highly distasteful here. My overweening airs as a boy have not been forgotten, and I have always been looked on as an interloper. Depend on it, poor old Brooks fancies the muddle in his accounts was a suggestion of my malice ! Imagine the feelings of Hiltonbury, when I, his supplanter, begin to tighten the reins.'

'If it be so, it can be got over,' said Honor, a little aghast.

'If it ought to be attempted,' said Owen ; 'but you have not heard my personal grounds for refusing your kindness. All your goodness and kind teaching cannot prevent the undesirableness of letting my child grow

up here, in a half-and-half position, engendering domineering airs and unreasonable expectations. You know how, in spite of your care and warnings, it worked on me, though I had more advantages than that poor little man. Dear Honor, it is not you, but myself that I blame. You did your utmost to disabuse me, and it is only the belief that my absurd folly is in human nature that makes me thus ungracious.'

'But,' said Honora, murmuring, as if in shame, 'you know you, and therefore your child, must be my especial charge, and always stand first with me.'

'First in your affection, dearest Honey,' he said, fondly; 'I trust I have been in that place these twenty years; I'll never give that up; but if I get as well as I hope to do, I mean to be no charge on any one.'

'You cannot return to your profession?'

'My riding and surveying days are over, but there's plenty of work in me still; and I see my way to a connexion that will find me in enough of writing, calculating, and drawing, to keep myself and Owen, and I expect to make something of my invention too, when I am settled in London.'

'In London?'

'Yes; the poor old woman in Whittington-street is breaking—pinning for her grandchild, I believe, and losing her lodgers, from not being able to make them comfortable; and, without what she had for the child, she cannot keep an effective servant. I think of going to help her out.'

'That woman?'

'Well, I do owe her a duty! I robbed her of her own child, and it is cruel to deprive her of mine when she has had all the trouble of his babyhood. Money would not do the thing, even if I had it. I have brought it on myself, and it is the only atonement in my power; so I mean to occupy two or three of her rooms, work there, and let her have the satisfaction of "doing for me." When you are in town, I shall hop into Woolstone-lane. You will give me holidays

here, wont you? And whenever you want me, let me be your son! To that you know I reserve my right,' and he bent towards her affectionately.

'It is very right—very noble,' she was faltering forth. He turned quickly, the tears, ready to fall, springing quite forth.

'Honor! you have not been able to say that since I was a child! Do not spoil it. If this be right, leave it so.'

'Only one thing, Owen, are you sufficiently considering your son's good in taking him there, out of the way of a good education.'

'A working education is the good one for him,' said Owen, 'not the being sent at the cost of others—not even covertly at yours, sweet Honey—to an expensive school. He is a working man's son, and must so feel himself. I mean to face my own penalties in him, and if I see him in a grade inferior to what was mine by birth, I shall know that though I brought it on him, it is more for his real good and happiness to be a man of the people, than a poor half-acknowledged gentleman. So much for my Americanisms, Honor!'

'But the dissent—the cant!'

'Not so much cant as real piety obtrusively expressed. Poor old thing! I have no fear but that little Giblets will go my way! he worships me, and I shall not leave his *h's* nor more important matters to her mercy. He is nearly big enough for the day school Mr. Parsons is setting on foot. It is a great consideration that the place is in the St. Matthew's district!'

'Well, Owen, I cannot but see that it may be your rightest course; I hope you may find yourself equal to it,' said Honor, struggling with a fresh sense of desertion, though with admiration and esteem returning, such as were well worth the disappointment.

'If not,' said Owen, smiling, to hide deeper feelings, 'I reserve to you the pleasure of maintaining me, nursing me, or what not! If my carcase be good for nothing, I hereby make it over to you. And now,

Honor, I have not been without thought for you. I can tell you of a better successor for Brooks.'

'Well!' she said, almost crossly.

'Humfrey Charlecote Randolph,' said Owen, slowly, giving full effect to the two Christian names.

Honor started, gasped, and snatching at the first that occurred of her objections, exclaimed, 'But, my dear, he is as much an engineer as yourself.'

'From necessity, not choice. He farmed till last August.'

'Canadian farming! Besides, what nonsense to offer a young man, with all the world before him, to be bailiff of this little place.'

'It would, were he only to stand in Brooks's position; but if he were the acknowledged heir, as he ought to be—yes, I know I am saying a dreadful thing—but, my good Queen Elizabeth, your Grace would be far wiser to accept Jamie at once than to keep your subjects fretting over your partialities. He will be a worthy Humfrey Charlecote if you catch and pin him down young. He will be worthy any way, but if you let him go levelling and roaming over the world for the best half of his life, this same Holt will lose its charms for him and his heirs for ever.'

'But—but how can you tell that he would be caught and pinned?'

'There is a very sufficient pin at the Underwood.'

'My dear Owen, impossible!'

'Mind, no one has told me in so many words, but Mervyn Fulmort gave me such an examination on Randolph as men use to do when matrimony is in the wind; and since that, he inferred the engagement, when he came to me in no end of a rage, because my backwoodsman had conscientious scruples against partaking in their concoction of evil spirits.'

'Do you mean that Mervyn wants to employ him?'

'To take him into partnership, on the consideration of a certain thirty thousand. You may judge whence that was to come! And he, like Robert, declined to

live by murdering bodies and souls. I am afraid Mervyn has been persecuting them ever since.'

'Ever since when?'

'This last conversation was some three weeks ago. I suspect the principal parties settled it on that snowy Twelfth-day——'

'But which of them, Owen?'

'Which?' exclaimed Owen, laughing. 'The goggle or the squint?'

'For shame, Owen. But I cannot believe that Phœbe would not have told me!'

'Having a sister like Lady Bannerman may hinder confidences to friends.'

'Now, Owen, are you sure?'

'As sure as I was that it was a moonstruck man that slept in my room in Woolstone Lane. I knew that Cynthia's darts had been as effective as though he had been a son of Niobe!'

'I don't believe it yet,' cried Honor; 'an honourable man—a sensible girl! Such a wild thing!'

'Ah! Queen Elizabeth! Queen Elizabeth! shut up an honourable man and a sensible girl in a cedar parlour every evening for ten days, and then talk of wild things! Have you forgotten what it is to be under twenty-five?'

'I hate Queen Elizabeth,' said Honor, somewhat tartly.

He muttered something of an apology, and resumed his book. She worked on in silence, then looking up said, rather as if rejoicing in a valid objection, 'How am I to know that this man is first in the succession? I am not suspecting him of imposition. I believe that, as you say, his mother was a Charlecote, but how do I know that she had not half-a-dozen brothers. There is no obligation on me to leave the place to any one, but this youth ought not to come before others.'

'That is soon answered,' said Owen. 'The runaway, your grandfather's brother, led a wild, Leather-Stocking life, till he was getting on in years, then married,

luckily not a squaw, and died at the end of the first year, leaving one daughter, who married Major Randolph, and had this only son.'

'The same relation to me as Humfrey! Impossible! And pray how do you prove this?'

'I got Currie to make notes for me which I can get at in my room,' said Owen. 'You can set your lawyer to write to the places, and satisfy yourself without letting him know anything about it.'

'Has he any expectations?'

'I imagine not. I think he has never found out that our relationship is not on the Charlecote side.'

'Then it is the more—impertinent, I really must say, in him to pay his addresses to Phœbe, if he have done so.'

'I can't agree with you. What was her father but an old distiller, who made his fortune and married an heiress. You sophisticated old Honey, to expect him to be dazzled with her fortune, and look at her from a respectful distance! I thought you believed that "a man's a man for a' that," and would esteem the bold spirit of the man of progress.'

'Progress, indeed!' said Honor, ironically.

'Listen, Honor,' said Owen, 'you had better accuse me of this fortune-hunting which offends you. I have only obeyed Fate, and so will you. From the moment I met him, he seemed as one I had known of old. It was Charlecotism, of course; and his signature filled me with presentiment. Nay, though the fire and the swamp have become mere hearsay to me now, I still retain the recollection of the impression throughout my illness that he was to be all that I might have been. His straightforward good sense and manly innocence brought Phœbe before me, and Currie tells me that I had fits of hatred to him as my supplanter, necessary as his care was to me.'

Honor just stopped herself from exclaiming, 'Never!' and changed it into 'My own dear, generous boy!'

'You forget that I thought it was all over with me!'

The first sensations I distinctly remember were as I lay on my bed at Montreal, one Sunday evening, and saw him sitting in the window, his profile clearly cut against the light, and retracing all those old silhouettes over the mantelshelf. Then I remembered that it had been no sick delusion, but truth and verity, that he was the missing Charlecote ! And feeling far more like death than life, I was glad that you should have some one to lean on of your own sort ; for, Honor, it was his Bible that he was reading !—one that he had saved out of the fire. I thought it was a lucid interval allowed me for the sake of giving you a better son and support than I had been, and looked forward to your being happy with him. As soon as I could get Currie alone, I told him how it stood, and made him take notes of the evidence of his identity, and promise to make you understand it if I were dead or childish. My best hope was to see him accepted as my expiation ; but when I got back, and you wouldn't have him at any price, and I found myself living and lifelike, and had seen her again——'

'Her ? Phœbe ? My poor boy, you do not mean——'

'I do mean that I was a greater fool than you even took me for,' said Owen, with rising colour. 'First and last, that pure child's face and honest, plain words had an effect on me which nothing else had. The other affair was a mere fever by comparison, and half against my will !'

'Owen !'

'Yes, it was. When I was with that poor thing, her fervour carried me along ; and as to the marriage, it was out of short-sighted dread of the uproar that would have followed if I had not done it. Either she would have drowned herself, or her mother would have prosecuted me for breach of promise, or she would have proclaimed all to Lucy or Mr. Prendergast. I hadn't courage for either ; though, Honor, I had nearly told you the day I went to Ireland, when I felt myself done for.'

‘You were married then?’

‘Half-an-hour!’ said Owen, with something of a smile, and a deep sigh. ‘If I had spoken, it would have saved a life! but I could not bear to lose my place with you, nor to see that sweet face turned from me.’

‘You must have known that it would come out in time, Owen. I never could understand your concealment.’

‘I hardly can,’ said Owen, ‘except that one shuffles off unpleasant subjects! I did fancy I could stave it off till Oxford was over, and I was free of the men there; but that notion might have been a mere excuse to myself for putting off the evil day. I was too much in debt, too, for an open rupture with you; and as to her, I can truly say that my sole shadow of an excuse is that I was too young and selfish to understand what I was inflicting!’ He passed his hand over his face, and groaned, as he added—‘Well, that is over now; and at last I can bear to look at her child!’ Then recurring in haste to the former subject—‘You were asking about Phœbe! Yes, when I saw the fresh face, ennobled, but as simple as ever, the dog in the manger seemed to me a reasonable beast! Randolph’s admiration was a bitter pill. If I were to be nailed here for ever, I could not well spare the moonbeams from my prison! But that’s over now—it was a diseased fancy! I have got my boy now, and can move about; and when I get into harness, and am in the way of seeing people, and maturing my invention, I shall never think of it again.’

‘Ah! I am afraid that is all I can wish for you!’

‘Don’t wish it so pitifully, then,’ said Owen, smiling. ‘After having had no hope of her for five years, and being the poor object I am, this is no such great blow; and I am come to the mood of benevolence in which I really desire nothing so much as to see them happy.’

‘I will think about it,’ said Honor.

And though she was bewildered and disappointed, the interview had, on the whole, made her happier, by re-

storing the power of admiring as much as she loved. Yet it was hard to be required to sacrifice the interests of one whom she adored, her darling, who might need help so much, to do justice to a comparative stranger; and the more noble and worthy Owen showed himself, the less willing was she to decide on committing herself to his unconscious rival. Still, did the test of idolatry lie here?

She perceived how light-hearted this conversation had rendered Owen, as though he had thrown off a weight that had long been oppressing him. He was overflowing with fun and drollery throughout the journey; and though still needing a good deal of assistance at all changes of carriage, showed positive boyish glee in every feat he could accomplish for himself; and instead of shyly shrinking from the observation and casual help of fellow-travellers, gave ready smiles and thanks.

Exhilarated instead of wearied by the journey, he was full of enjoyment of the lodgings, the window, and the view; a new spring of youthfulness seemed to have come back to him, and his animation and enterprise carried Honor along with him. Assuredly she had never known more thorough present pleasure than in his mirthful, affectionate talk, and in the sight of his daily progress towards recovery; and a still greater happiness was in store for her. On the second day, he begged to accompany her to the week-day service at the neighbouring church, previously sending in a request for the offering of the thanks of Owen Charteris Sandbrook for preservation in a great danger, and recovery from severe illness.

‘Dearest,’ she said, ‘were I to recount my causes of thanksgiving, I should not soon have done! This is best of all.’

‘Not fully *best* yet, is it?’ said Owen, looking up to her with eyes like those of his childhood.

‘No; but it soon will be.’

‘Not yet,’ said Owen; ‘I must think first; perhaps

write or talk to Robert Fulmort. I feel as if I *could* now.'

'You long for it?'

'Yes, as I never even *thought* I did,' said Owen, with much emotion. 'It was strange, Honor, as soon as I came home to the old places, how the old feelings, that had been set aside so long, came back again. I would have given the world to recover them in Canada, but could only envy Randolph, till they woke up again of themselves at the sight of the study, and the big Bible we used to read with you.'

'Yet you never spoke.'

'No; I *could* not till I had proved to myself that there was no time-serving in them, if you must know the truth!' said Owen, colouring a little. 'Besides, having been told my wits would go, how did I know but that they were a symptom of my second childhood?'

'How could any one have been so cruel as to utter such a horrible presage?'

'One overhears and understands more than people imagine, when one has nothing to do but to lie on the broad of one's back and count the flies,' said Owen. 'So, when I was convinced that my machine was as good as ever, but only would not stand application, I put off the profession, just to be sure what I should think of it when I could *think*.'

'Well!' was all Honor could say, gazing through glad tears.

'And now, Honor dear,' said he, with a smile, 'I don't know how it is. I've tried experiments on my brains. I have gone through half-a-dozen tough calculations. I have read over a Greek play, and made out a problem or two in mechanics, without being the worse for it; but, somehow, I can't for the life of me hark back to the opinions that had such power over me at Oxford. I can't even recollect the half of them. It is as if that hemlock spruce had battered them out of my head.'

‘Even like as a dream when one awaketh.’

‘Something like it! Why, even *unknownst* to you, sweet Honey, I got at one or two of the books I used to swear by, and somehow I could not see the force of what they advanced. There’s a futility about it all, compared with the substance.’

‘Before, you did not believe with your heart, so your understanding failed to be convinced.’

‘Partly so,’ said Owen, thoughtfully. ‘The fact is, that religion is so much proved to the individual by personal experience and actual sensation, that those who reason from without are on different ground, and the *avvocato del diavolo* has often apparently the advantage, because the other party’s security is that witness in his own breast which cannot be brought to light.’

‘Only apparently.’

‘Really sometimes, with the lookers-on who have accepted the doctrines without feeling them. They, having no experience, feel the failure of evidence, where the tangible ends.’

‘Do you mean to say that this was the case with yourself, my dear? I should have thought, if ever child were good——’

‘So did I,’ said Owen, smiling. ‘I simulated the motions to myself and every one else; and there was a grain of reality, after all; but neither you nor I ever knew how much was mere imitation and personal influence. When I outgrew implicit faith in *you*, I am afraid my higher faith went with it—first through recklessness, then through questioning. After believing more than enough, the transition is easy to doubting what is worthy of credit at all.’

‘From superstition to rationalism.’

‘Yes; overdoing articles of faith and observances, while the mind and conscience are young and tender, brings a dangerous reaction when liberty and independent reflection begin.’

‘But, Owen, I may have overdone observances, yet I did not teach superstitions,’ said Honor.

‘Not consciously,’ said Owen. ‘You meant to teach me dogmatically only what you absolutely believed yourself. But you did not know how boundless is a child’s readiness to accept what comes as from a spiritual authority, or you would have drawn the line more strongly between doctrine and opinion, fact and allegory, the true and the edifying.’

‘In effect, I treated you as the Romish Church began by doing to the populace.’

‘Exactly so. Like the mediæval populace, I took legend for fact; and like the modern populace, doubted of the whole together, instead of sifting. There is my confession, Honor dear. I know you are happier for hearing it in full; but remember, my errors are not chargeable upon you. If I had ever been true towards myself or you, and acted out what I thought I felt, I should have had the personal experience that would have protected the truth when the pretty superstructure began to pass away.’

‘What you have undertaken now is an acting out!’

‘I hope it is. Therefore it is the first time that I have ever trusted myself to be in earnest. And after all, Honor, though it is a terrible past to look back on, it is so very pleasant to be coming *home*, and to realize mercy and pardon, and hopes of doing better, that I can’t feel half the broken-down sorrow that perhaps ought to be mine. It won’t stay with me, when I have you before me.’

Honor could not be uneasy. She was far too glad at heart for that. The repentance was proving itself true by its fruits, and who could be anxious because the gladness of forgiveness overpowered the pain of contrition?

Her inordinate affection had made her blind and credulous where her favourite was concerned, so as to lead to his seeming ruin, yet when the idol throne was

overtaken, she had learnt to find sufficiency in her Maker, and to do offices of love without excess. Then after her time of loneliness, the very darling of her heart had been restored, when it was safe for her to have him once more ; but so changed that he himself guarded against any recurrence to the old exclusive worship.



CHAPTER XXI.

But the pine woods waved,
And the white streams raved.
They told me in my need,
That softness and feeling
Were not soul-healing;
And so it was decreed—

That the marvellous flowers of woman's duty,
Should grow on the grave of buried beauty.

FABER.



ASTER was at hand, and immediately after it, Mr. Currie was to return to Canada to superintend the formation of the Grand Ottawa and Superior line. He and his assistants were hard at work on the specifications, when a heavy tap and tramp came up the stairs, and Owen Sandbrook stood before them, leaning on his crutch, and was greeted with joyful congratulations on being on his legs again.

‘Randolf,’ he said, hastily, ‘Miss Charlecote is waiting in the carriage to speak to you. Give me your pen.’

‘I shall be back in an instant.’

‘Time will show. Where are you?—“such sleepers to be——” I see. Down with you.’

‘Yes; never mind hurrying back,’ said the engineer; ‘we can get this done without you’—and as the door closed—and a good deal beside. I hear you have put it in train.’

‘I have every reason to hope so. Does he guess?’

‘Not a whit, as far as I can tell. He has been working hard, and improving himself in his leisure. He would have made a first-rate engineer. It is really hard to be robbed of two such assistants one after the other.’

Meanwhile Honor had spent those few moments in trepidation. She had brought herself to it at last! The lurking sense of injustice had persuaded her that it was crossing her conscience to withhold the recognition of her heir, so soon as she had received full evidence of his claims and his worthiness. Though she had the power, she felt that she had not the right to dispose of her property otherwise; and such being the case, it was a duty to make him aware of his prospects, and offer him such a course as should best enable him to take his future place in the county. Still it was a severe struggle. Even with her sense of insufficiency, it was hard to resign any part of the power that she had so long exercised; she felt that it was a risk to put her happiness into unknown hands, and perhaps because she had had this young man well-nigh thrust on her, and had heard him so much lauded, she almost felt antagonistic to him as a rival of Owen, and could have been glad if any cause for repudiating him would have arisen? Even the favour that he had met with in Phœbe’s eyes was no recommendation. She was still sore at Phœbe’s want of confidence in her; she took Mervyn’s view of his presumption, and moreover it was another prize borne off from Owen. Poor dear Honor, she never made a greater sacrifice to principle than when she sent her William off to Normandy to summon her Edgar Atheling.

She did not imagine that she had it in her to have hated any one so much.

Yet, somehow, when the bright, open face appeared, it had the kindred, familiar air, and the look of eagerness so visibly fell at the sight of her alone in the carriage, that she could not defend herself from a certain

amusement and interest, while she graciously desired him to get in, and drive with her round the Park, since she had something to tell him that could not be said in a hurry. Then, as he looked up in inquiry, suspecting, perhaps, that she had heard of his engagement, she rushed at once to the point.

‘I believe you know,’ she said, ‘that I have no nearer relation than yourself?’

‘Not Sandbrook?’ he asked, in surprise.

‘He is on my mother’s side. I speak of my own family. When the Holt came to me, it was as a trust for my lifetime to do my best for it, and to find out to whom afterwards it should belong. I was told that the direct heir was probably in America. Owen Sandbrook has convinced me that you are that person.’

‘Thank you,’ began young Randolph, somewhat embarrassed; ‘but I hope that this will make little difference to me for many years!’

Did he underrate the Holt, the wretch, or was it civility. She spoke a little severely. ‘It is not a considerable property, but it gives a certain position, and it should make a difference to you to know what your prospects are.’

The colour flushed into his cheeks as he said, ‘True! It may have a considerable effect in my favour. Thank you for telling me;’ and then paused, as though considering whether to volunteer more, but as yet her manner was not encouraging, but had all the dryness of effort.

‘I have another reason for speaking,’ she continued. ‘It is due to you to warn you that the estate wants looking after. I am unequal to the requirements of modern agriculture, and my faithful old bailiff, who was left to me by my dear cousin, is past his work. Neither the land nor the people are receiving full justice.’

‘Surely Sandbrook could find a trustworthy steward,’ returned the young man.

‘Nay, had you not better, according to his sugges-

tion, come and live on the estate yourself, and undertake the management, with an allowance in proportion to your position as the heir?

Her heart beat high with the crisis, and she saw his colour deepen from scarlet to crimson as he said, 'My engagement with Mr. Currie——'

'Mr. Currie knows the state of things. Owen Sandbrook has been in communication with him, and he does not expect to take you back with him, unless you prefer the variety and enterprise of your profession to becoming 'a country gentleman of moderate means.' She almost hoped that he would, as she named the rental and the proposed allowance, adding, 'The estate must eventually come to you, but it is for you to consider whether it may not be better worth having if, in the interim, it be under your superintendence.'

He had had time to grow more familiar with the idea, and spoke readily and frankly. 'Indeed, Miss Charlecote, I need no inducement. It is the life I should prefer beyond all others, and I can only hope to do my duty by you, and whatever you may think fit to entrust to me.' And, almost against her will, the straightforward honesty of his look brought back to her the countenance where she had always sought for help.

'Then your past misfortunes have not given you a distaste to farming?'

'They did not come from farming, but speculation. I was brought up to farm work, and am more at home in it than in anything else, so that I hope I could be useful to you.'

She was silent. Oh, no; she had not the satisfaction of being displeased. He was ready enough, but not grasping; and she found herself seeing more of the Charlecote in him, and liking him better than she was ready to grant.

'Miss Charlecote,' he said, after a few moments' thought, 'in the relations you are establishing between

us, it is right that you should know the full extent of the benefits you are conferring.'

It was true, then? Well, it was better than a New World lady, and Honora contrived to look pleasantly expectant.

'I know it was very presumptuous,' he said; 'but I could not help making my feelings known to one who is very dear to you—Miss Fulmort.'

'Indeed she is,' said Honor; though maybe poor Phoebe had of late been a shade less dear to her.

'And with your consent,' said he, perhaps a little disconcerted by her want of warmth, 'I hope this kindness of yours may abridge the term of waiting to which we looked forward.'

'What were you waiting for?'

'Until such time as I could provide a home to which she could take her sister Maria. So you see what you have done for us.'

'Maria?'

'Yes. She promised her mother, on her deathbed, that Maria should be her charge, and no one could wish her to lay it aside.'

'And the family are aware of the attachment?'

'The brothers are, and have been, kinder than I dared to expect. It was thought better to tell no one else until we could see our way; but you have a right to know now, and I have the more hope that you will find comfort in the arrangement, since I know how warmly and gratefully she feels towards you. I may tell her?' he added, with a good deal of affirmation in his question.

'What would you do if I told you not?' she asked, thawing for the first time out of her set speeches.

'I should feel very guilty and uncomfortable in writing.'

'Then come home with me to-morrow, and let us talk it over,' she said, acting on a mandate of Owen's which she had strenuously refused to promise to obey.

‘You may leave your work in Owen’s hands. He wants to stay a few days in town, to arrange his plans, and, I do believe, to have the pleasure of independence; but he will come back on Saturday, and we will spend Easter together.’

‘Miss Charlecote,’ said Humfrey, suddenly, ‘I have no right to ask, but I cannot but fear that my having turned up is an injury to Sandbrook.’

‘I can only tell you that he has been exceedingly anxious for the recognition of your rights.’

‘I understand now!’ exclaimed Humfrey, turning towards her quickly; ‘he betrayed it when his mind was astray. I am thrusting him out of what would have been his!’

‘It cannot be helped,’ began Honor; ‘he never expected——’

‘I can say nothing against it,’ said the young man, with much emotion. ‘It is too generous to be talked of, and these are not matters of choice, but duty; but is it not possible to make some compensation?’

‘I have done my best to lay up for those children,’ said Honor; ‘but his sister will need her full half, and my City property has other claimants. I own I should be glad to secure that, after me, he should not be entirely dependent upon health which, I fear, will never be sound again.’

‘I know you would be happier in arranging it yourself, though he has every claim on my gratitude. Could not the estate be charged with an annuity to him?’

‘Thank you!’ said Honor, warmly. ‘Such a provision will suit him best. I see that London is his element; indeed, he is so much incapacitated for a country life that the estate would have been a burthen to him, could he have rightly inherited it. He is bent on self-maintenance; and all I wish is, that when I am gone, he should have something to fall back upon.’

‘I do not think that I can thank you more heartily for any of your benefits than for making me a party

to this !' he warmly said. 'But there is no thanking you ; I must try to do so by deeds.'

She was forced to allow that her Atheling was winning upon her !

'Two points I liked,' she said to Robert, who spent the evening with her, while Owen was dining with Mr. Currie—'one that he accepted the Holt as a charge, not a gift—the other that he never professed to be marrying for *my* sake.'

'Yes, he is as true as Phoebe,' said Robert. 'Both have real power of truth from never deceiving themselves. They perfectly suit one another.'

'High praise from you, Robin. Yet how could you forgive his declaration from so unequal a position ?'

'I thought it part of his consistently honest dealing. Had she been a mere child, knowing nothing of the world, and subject to parents, it might have been otherwise ; but independent and formed as she is, it was but just to avow his sentiments, and give her the choice of waiting.'

'In spite of the obloquy of a poor man paying court to wealth ?'

'I fancy he was too single-minded for that idea, and that it was not wealth which he courted was proved by his rejection of Mervyn's offer. Do you know, I think his refusal will do Mervyn a great deal of good. He is very restless to find out the remaining objections to his management, and Randolph will have more influence with him than I ever could, while he considers parsons as a peculiar species.'

'If people would only believe the good of not compromising !'

'They must often wait a good while to see the good !'

'But, oh ! the fruit is worth waiting for ! Robin, she added, after a pause, 'you have been in correspondence with my boy.'

'Yes,' said Robert ; 'and there, indeed, you may be satisfied. The seed you sowed in the morning is bearing its increase !'

'I sowed ! Ah, Robert ! what I sowed was a false crop, that had almost caused the good seed to be rooted up together with it !'

'Not altogether,' said Robert. 'If you made any mistakes that led to a confusion of real and unreal in his mind, still, the real good you did to him is incalculable.'

'So he tells me, dear boy ! But when I think what he was as a child, and what he has been as a youth, I cannot but charge it on myself.'

'Then think what he is, and will be, I trust, as a man,' said Robert. 'Even at the worst, the higher, purer standard that had been impressed on him saved him from lower depths ; and when "he came to himself," it was not as if he had neither known his Father's house nor the way to it. Oh, Miss Charlecote ! you must not come to me to assure you that your training of him was in vain ! I, who am always feeling the difference between trying to pull him and poor Mervyn upwards ! There may be more excuse for Mervyn, but Owen knows where he is going, and springs towards it ; while Mervyn wonders at himself at every stage, and always fancies the next some delusion of my straitlaced imagination.'

'Ah ! once I spurned, and afterwards grieved over, the saying that very religious little boys either die or belie their promise.'

'There is some truth in it,' said Robert. 'Precocious piety is so beautiful that it is apt to be fostered so as to make it insensibly imitative and unreal, or depend upon some individual personal influence ; and there is a certain reaction at one stage of growth against what has been overworked.'

'Then what would you do with such a child as my Owen if it were all to come over again ? His aspirations were often so beautiful that I could not but reverence them greatly ; and I cannot now believe that they were prompted by aught but innocence and baptismal grace !'

‘Looking back,’ said Robert, ‘I believe they were genuine, and came from his heart. No ; such a devotional turn should be treated with deep reverence and tenderness ; but the expression had better be almost repressed, and the test of conduct enforced, though without loading the conscience with details not of general application, and sometimes impracticable under other circumstances.’

‘It is the practicalness of dear Owen’s reformation that makes it so thoroughly satisfactory,’ said Honora ; ‘though I must say that I dread the experiment. You will look after him, for this week, Robert ; I fear he is overdoing himself in his delight at moving about and working again.’

‘I will see how he gets on. It will be a good essay for the future.’

‘I cannot think how he is ever to bear living with Mrs. Murrell.’

‘She is a good deal broken and subdued, and is more easily repressed than one imagines at her first onset. Besides, she is very proud, and rather afraid, of him, and will not molest him much. Indeed, it is a good arrangement for him ; he ought to have care above that of the average landlady.’

‘Will he get it ?’

‘I trust so. She has the ways of a respectable servant ; and her religious principle is real, though we do not much admire its manifestation. She will be honest and careful of his wants, and look after his child, and nurse him tenderly if he require it !’

‘As if any one but myself would do that ! But it is right, and he will be all the better and happier for accepting his duty to her while she lives, if he can bear it.’

‘As he says, it is his only expiation.’

‘Well ! I should not wonder if you saw more of me here than hitherto. A born Cockney like me gets inclined to the haunts of men as she grows old, and if your sisters and Charlecote Raymond suffice for the

parish, I shall be glad to be out of sight of the improvements *he* will make.'

'Not without your consent?'

'I shall have to consent in my conscience to what I hate in my heart.'

'I am not the man to argue you away from here,' said Robert, eagerly. 'If you would take up the Young Woman's Association, it would be the only thing to make up for the loss of Miss Fennimore. Then the St. Wulstan's Asylum wants a lady visitor.'

'My father's foundation, whence his successor ousted me, in a general sweep of troublesome ladies,' said Honor. 'How sore I was, and how things come round.'

'We'll find work for you,' cried Robert, highly exhilarated. 'I should like to make out that we can't do without you.'

'Why, Robin, you of all men taking to compliments!'

'It is out of self-interest. Nothing makes so much difference to me as having this house inhabited.'

'Indeed,' she said, highly gratified; 'I thought you wanted nothing but St. Matthew's.'

'Nay,' said Robert, as a bright colour came over his usually set and impassive countenance. 'You do not want me to say what you have always been to me, and how better things have been fostered by your presence, ever since the day you let me out of Hiltonbury Church. I have often since thought it was no vain imagination that you were a good spirit sent to my rescue by Mr. Charlecote.'

'Poor Robin,' said Honor, her lip quivering; 'it was less what I gave than what you gathered up. I barely tolerated you.'

'Which served me right,' said Robert, 'and made me respect you. There are so few to blame me now that I need you all the more. I can hardly cede to Owen the privilege of being your only son.'

'You are my autumn-singing Robin,' said Honor, too true to let him think that he could stand beside Owen

in her affections, but with intense pleasure at such unwonted warmth from one so stern and reserved; it was as if he was investing her with some of the tenderness that the loss of Lucilla had left vacant, and bestowing on her the confidences to which new relations might render Phœbe less open. It was no slight preferment to be Robert Fulmort's motherly friend; and far beyond her as he had soared, she might still be the softening element in his life, as once she had been the ennobling one. If she had formed Robert, or even given one impulse such as to lead to his becoming what he was, the old maid had not lived in vain.

She was not selfish enough to be grieved at Owen's ecstasy in emancipation; and trusting to being near enough to watch over him without being in his way, she could enjoy his overflowing spirits, and detect almost a jocund sound in the thump of his crutch across the hall, as he hurried in, elated with hopes of the success of his invention, eager about the Canadian railway, delighted with the society of his congeners, and pouring out on her all sorts of information that she could not understand. The certainty that her decision was for his happiness ought surely to reconcile her to carrying home his rival in his stead.

Going down by an early train, she resolved, by Robert's advice, to visit Beauchamp at once, and give Mervyn a distinct explanation of her intentions. He was tardy in taking them in, then exclaimed—'Phœbe's teetotaller! Well, he is a sharp fellow! The luck that some men have!'

'Dear Phœbe,' cried Cecily, 'I am so thankful that she is spared a long attachment. It was telling on her already!'

'Oh, we should have put a stop to the affair if he had gone out to Canada,' roundly asserted Mervyn; 'but of course he knew better——'

'Not at all—this was quite a surprise.'

Mervyn recollected in time that it was best that Miss Charlecote should so imagine, and reserved for his

wife's private ear his conviction that the young fellow had had this hope in his eye when refusing the partnership. Such smartness and foresight commanded his respect as a man of the world, though maybe the women would not understand it. For Phœbe's interest, he must encourage the lady in her excellent intentions.

'It is very handsome in you, Miss Charlecote—very handsome—and I am perfectly unprejudiced in assuring you that you have done the very best thing for yourself. Phœbe is a good girl, and devoted to you already.'

'Indeed she is,' said Cecily. 'She looks up to you so much!'

Somehow Honor did not want Mrs. Fulmort to assure her of this.

'And as to the place,' continued Mervyn, 'you could not put it into better hands to get your people out of their old world ways. A young man like that, used to farming, and with steam and mechanics at his fingers' ends, will make us all look about us.'

'Perhaps,' murmured poor Honor, with quailing heart.

'John Raymond and I were looking about the Holt the other day,' said Mervyn, 'and agreeing how much more could be made of it. Clear away some of those hedgerows—grub up a bit of copse or two—try chemical manures—drain that terrible old marsh beyond the plantation—and have up a good engine-house where you have those old ramshackle buildings at the Home Farm! Why, the place will bring in as much again, and you've hit on the very man to carry it out. He shall try all the experiments before I adopt them.'

Honora felt as if she must flee! If she were to hear any more she should be ready to banish young Randolph to Canada, were he ten times her heir. Had she lived to hear Humfrey's new barn, with the verge boards conceded to her taste, called ramshackle? And she had given her word!

As she left Beauchamp, and looked at her scraggy pine-trees cresting the hill, she felt as though they

were her own no longer, and as if she had given them up to an enemy. She assured herself that nothing could be done without her free will, and considered of the limitations that must be imposed on this frightful reformer, but her heart grew sick at the conviction that either she would have to yield, or be regarded as a mere incubus and obstruction.

With almost a passionate sense of defence of Humfrey's trees, and Humfrey's barns, she undid the gate of the fir plantations—his special favourites. The bright April sun shed clear gleams athwart the russet boles of the trees, candied by their white gum, the shadows were sharply defined, and darkened by the dense silvered green canopy, relieved by fresh light young shoots, culminating in white powdery clusters, or little soft crimson conelets, all redolent of fresh resinous fragrance. The wind whispered like the sound of ocean in the summit of the trees, and a nightingale was singing gloriously in the distance. All recalled Humfrey, and the day, thirty years back, when she had given him such sore pain, in those very woods, grasping the shadow instead of the substance, and taking the sunshine out of his life as well as from her own. Never had she felt such a pang in thinking of that day, or in the vain imagination of how it might have been!

'Yet I believe I am doing right,' she thought. 'Humfrey himself might say that old things must pass away, and the past give place to the present! Let me stand once more under the tree where I gave him that answer! Shall I feel as if he would laugh at me for my shrinking, or approve me for my resolution?'

The tree was a pinaster, of lengthy foliage and ponderous cones, standing in a little shooting-path, leading from the main walk. She turned towards it and stood breathless for a moment.

There stood the familiar figure—youthful, well-knit, firm, with the open, steadfast, kindly face, but with the look of crowned exultant love that she had only once beheld, and that when his feet were already within the

waters of the dark river. It was his very voice that exclaimed, 'Here she is!' Had her imagination indeed called up Humfrey before her, or was he come to upbraid her with her surrender of his charge to modern innovation? But the spell was broken, for a woodland nymph in soft grey, edged with green, was instantly beside him, and that calmly-glad face was no reflection of what Honora's had ever been.

'Dear, dear Miss Charlecote,' cried Phœbe, springing to her; 'we thought you would come home this way, so we came to meet you, and were watching both the paths.'

'Thank you, my dear,' said Honor. Could that man, who looked so like Humfrey, be thinking how those firs would cut up into sleepers?

'Do you know,' said Phœbe, eagerly, 'he says this wood is a little likeness of his favourite place in his old home.'

'I am afraid,' he added, as if apologizing, 'I shall always feel most at home in the smell of pine-trees.'

Mervyn's predictions began to lose their force, and Honor smiled.

'But,' said Phœbe, turning to her, 'I was longing to beg your pardon. I did not like to have any secret from you.'

'Ah! you cunning children,' said Honor, finding surface work easiest; 'you stole a march upon us all.'

'I could not help it,' said Phœbe.

They both laughed, and turning to him, she said, 'Now, could I? When you spoke to me, I could only tell the truth.'

'And I suppose he could not help it,' said Honor.

'Of course not, if there was no reason for helping it,' he said.

There could be no dwelling on the horrible things that he would perpetrate, while he looked so like the rightful squire, and while both were so fair a sight in their glad gratitude; and she found herself saying, 'You will bear our name.'

There might be a pang in setting aside that of his father, but he looked at the glowing cheeks and glistening eyes beside him, and said, 'Answer for me.'

'It is what I should like best of all,' Phœbe said, fervently.

'If we can deserve to bear it,' he gravely added.

And something in his tone made Honora feel confident that, even if he should set up an engine-house, it would be only if Humfrey would have done so in his place.

'It will be belonging to you all the more,' said Phœbe. 'It is one great pleasure that now I shall have a right to you!'

'Yes, Phœbe, the old woman will depend on you, her "Eastern moon brightening as day's wild lights decline." But she will trouble you no longer. Finish your walk with Humfrey.' It was the first time she had called him by that name.

'No,' they said, with one voice, 'we were waiting to walk home with you, if we may.'

There was something in that walk, in the tender, respectful kindness with which she was treated, in the intelligent interest that Humfrey showed in the estate, his clear-headed truthfulness on the need of change, and his delicate deference in proposing alteration, that set her heart at rest, made her feel that the 'goodly heritage' was in safe hands, and that she had a staff in her hands for the first time since that Sunday in harvest.

Before the next harvest, Hiltonbury bells rang out, and the church was crowded with glad faces; but there was none more deeply joyful than that of the lonely woman with silvering hair, who quietly knelt beside the grey slab, lettered H. C., 1840, convinced that the home and people of him who lay there would be in trusty hands, when she should join him in his true inheritance. Her idols set aside, she could with clearer eyes look to that hope, though in no weariness of earth,

no haste to depart, but still in full strength, ready to work for man's good and God's glory.

Beside her, as usual, was Owen, leaning on his crutch, but eminent in face and figure as the handsomest man present, and full of animation, betraying neither pain nor regret, but throughout the wedding festivities showing himself the foremost in mirth, and spurring Hiltonbury on to rejoicings that made the villagers almost oblivious of the Forest Show.

The saddest face in church was that of the head bridesmaid. Even though Phoebe was only going as far as the Holt, and Humfrey was much loved, Bertha's heart was sore with undefined regret for her own blotted past, and with the feeling of present loss in the sister whose motherly kindness she had never sufficiently recognised. Bertha knew not how much gentler and more loveable she herself was growing in that very struggle with her own sadness, and in her endeavours to be sufficient protectress for Maria. The two sisters were to remain at the Underwood with Miss Fennimore, and in her kindness, and in daily intercourse with Phoebe and Cecily, could hardly fail to be happy. Maria was radiantly glad, in all the delight of her bridesmaid's adornments and of the school feasting, and above all in patronizing her pretty little niece, Elizabeth Acton, the baby bridesmaid.

It was as if allegiance to poor Juliana's dislikes had hitherto kept Sir Bevil aloof from Phoebe, and deterred him from manifesting his good-will ; but the marriage brought him at last to Beauchamp, kind, grave, military, and melancholy as ever, and so much wrapped up in his little girl and his fancied memory of her mother, that Cecily's dislike of long attachments was confirmed by his aspect ; and only her sanguine benevolence was bold enough to augur his finding a comforter in her cousin Susan.

Poor man ! Lady Bannerman had been tormenting him all the morning with appeals to his own wedding as precedents for Cecily's benefit ! Her instructions to

Cecily were so overwhelming as to reduce that meek little lady to something approaching to annihilation; and the simple advice given by Bertha, and backed by Phœbe herself, 'never to mind,' appeared the summit of audacity! Long since having ceased to trouble herself as to the danger of growing too stout, Lady Bannerman, in her brocades and laces, was such a mountain of a woman that she was forced to sail up the aisle of Hiltonbury church alone in her glory, without space for a cavalier beside her!

The bridegroom's friend was his little seven years' old brother, whom he had sent for to place at a good school, and who fraternized with little Owen, a brisk little fellow, his *h's* and his manners alike doing credit to the paternal training, and preparing in due time to become a blue-gowned and yellow-legged Christ's Hospital scholar—a nomination having been already promised through the Fulmort City influence.

Robert assisted Charlecote Raymond in the rite which joined together the young pair. They were goodly to look upon, in their grave, glad modesty and self-possession, and their youthful strength and fairness—which, to Honor's mind, gave the idea of the beauty of simple strength and completeness, such as befits a well-built vessel at her launch, in all her quiet force, whether to glide over smooth waters or to battle with the tempest. Peaceful as those two faces were, there was in them spirit and resolution sufficient for either storm or calm, for it was steadfastness based upon the only strong foundation.

For the last time was signed, and with no unsteady hand, the clear, well-made letters of the maiden Phœbe Fulmort, and as, above it, the bride read the words, 'Humfrey Charlecote Randolph Charlecote,' she looked up to her husband with a sweet half-smile of content and exultation, as though his name were doubly endeared, as recalling her 'wise man,' the revered guardian of her imagination in her orphaned girlhood.

There are years when the buds of spring are nipped by frost or blight, and when summer blossoms are rent by hail and storm, till autumn sets in without one relenting pause. Then, even at the commencement of decline, comes an interval, a renewal of all that former seasons had proffered of fair and sweet; the very tokens of decay are lovely—the skies are deep calm blue, the sunsets soft gold, and the exquisite serenity and tranquil enjoyment are beyond even the bright, fitful hopes of spring. There is a tinge of melancholy, for this is a farewell, though a lingering farewell; and for that very cause the enduring flowers, the brilliant leaves, the persevering singing birds, are even more prized than those which, in earlier months, come less as present boons than foretastes of the future.

Such an Indian summer may be Honor Charlecote's present life. It is not old age, for she has still the strength and health of her best days, but it is the later stage of middle life, with experience added to energy. Her girlhood suffered from a great though high-minded mistake, her womanhood was careworn and sorrow-stricken. As first the beloved of her youth, so again the darling of her after-age, was a disappointment; but she was patient, and patience has met with a reward, even in this life. Desolateness taught her to rely no longer on things of earth, but to satisfy her soul with that Love which is individual as well as Infinite; and that lesson learnt, the human affection that once failed her is come back upon her in full measure. She is no longer forlorn; the children whom she bred up, and those whom she led by her influence, alike vie with one another in their love and gratitude.

The old house in Woolstone Lane is her home for the greater part of the winter and spring, and her chief work lies in her father's former parish, directed by Mr. Parsons and Robert, and enjoying especially the Sunday evenings that Owen constantly spends with her in the cedar parlour, in such converse, whether grave or gay, as men rarely seek save with a mother,

or one who has been as a mother. But she is still the lady of the Holt. There she still spends autumn and Christmas, resuming her old habits, without feeling them a burthen ; bemoaning a little, but approving all the while, Humfrey's moderate and successful alterations, and loving and delighting above all in Phoebe's sweet wisdom in her happy household rule. It is well worth all the past to return to the Holt with the holiday feeling of her girlhood.

THE END.

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